

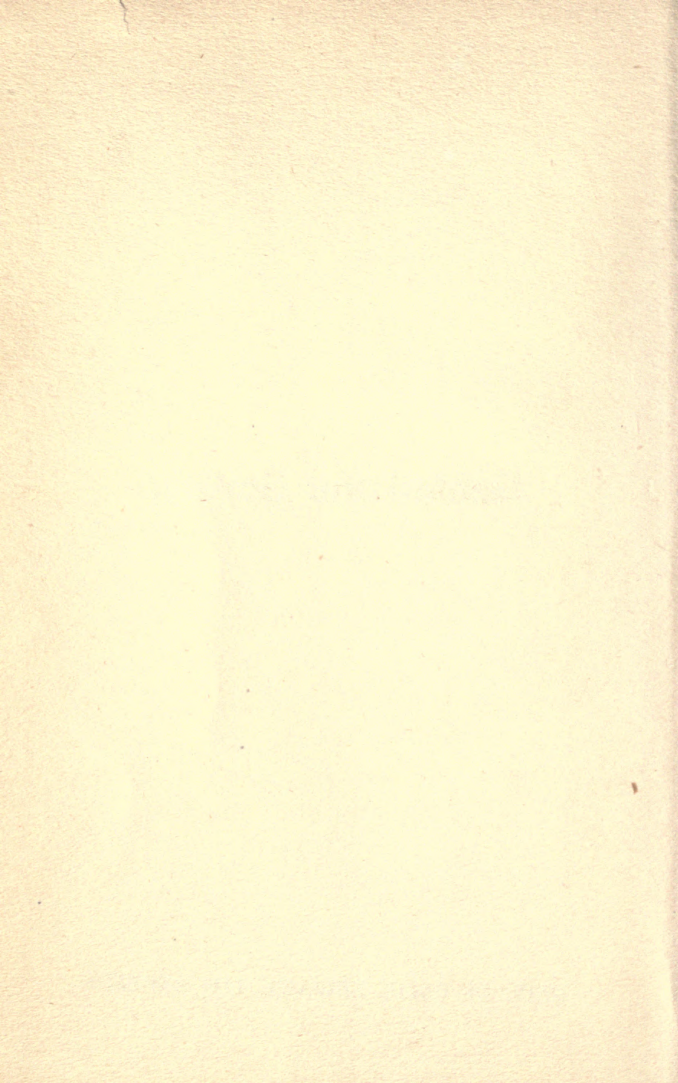
William Almon Wolff

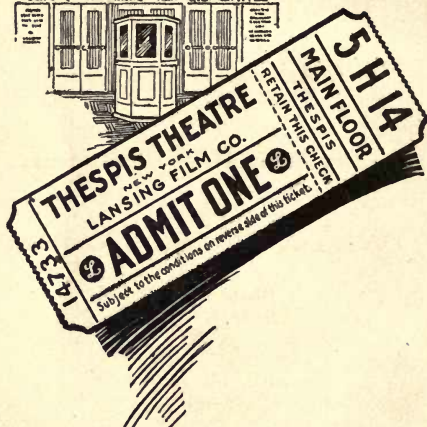
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Behind the Screen

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Behind the Screen

Hero --- Robert Lansing

The Girl --- Mary Brewster

The Villain --- Jim Hazzard

with an
Exceptionally Strong Company

by
WILLIAM ALMON WOLFF

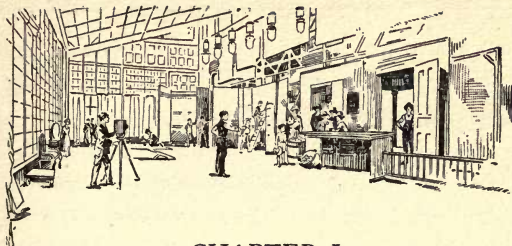
Illustrations by
FRED J. ARTING



CHICAGO
A. C. McCLURG & Co.
1916

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1916

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CHAPTER I

LANSING got out into the avenue just as the newsboys began calling his own name. One of the boys pushed up at him a paper, damp and sticky still with the thick ink that went into its glaring headlines, and he bought it instinctively. Other people, all around him, were buying papers, too, and he caught himself, in a moment, turning, with them, to look at the big bulk of the great store he had just left. He felt, somehow, that same half-detached, half-personal interest in the passing of an institution that moved the curious glances of these passers-by.

And then a futile wave of anger overcame him, shaking him, leaving him white and sick. He hurried on, lest some of these people who were looking up from their papers at the big building should recognize him, and scornfully point him

[1]

out one to the other. He could hear, voiced by the demon of self-consciousness that was taking possession of him, even what they would say:

“ There — see him? That’s young Lansing! ” That was what he imagined them to be saying. “ Old man Lansing’s son, you know. Say — if I’d had the chance his old man gave him — and he’s let the whole thing go to pot! Receivers for Lansing’s! What do you know about that? ”

That slang phrase that came so pat to his mind summed the whole business up so brutally, so aptly. What did he know about it? Why, nothing at all. That was just the trouble. The big store, and his interest in it, had just been an institution to him, as it had been to the whole city. He hadn’t had anything to do with its success; that had been made, laboriously, before he was born, or while he was growing up, a rich man’s son. He hadn’t had anything to do with its failure, either. That it was, really, that rankled. That was the thing that filled him with the greatest bitterness.

And it was a bitterness fairly easy to understand, too, when you had the facts, as he had them. It wasn’t he, Robert Lansing, who had

failed. Failure, in itself, if a man has the right sort of stuff in him, can be as stimulating, as tonic, as valuable as success. But not the sort of failure that had come to Lansing's — and to Robert Lansing. To him, this failure brought the same sensation a man must feel when a bridge collapses under him — with the difference that Lansing knew he should have looked to his own supports. He couldn't get away from that. He had shirked, evaded, deliberately, the responsibilities that had come to him. If he had not shirked, if he had played an active part in Lansing's, the failure would probably have been just as inevitable, he knew. He couldn't console himself with the thought that others had shirked, too; that they had made mistakes. Perhaps they had, but it wasn't for him to justify himself in any such fashion as that.

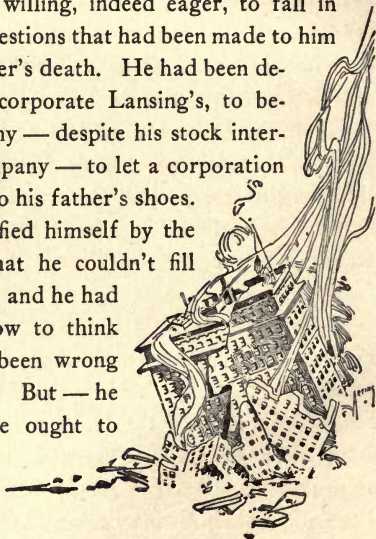
He had known what was coming for days, of course. With the approach of the crisis that had finally resulted in the bankruptcy of the big store, the active heads of the business had taken him into their confidence. They had had to, for one thing; they needed the money that he had still been able to help them to raise. When it was too

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late, he had flung himself, rather savagely, into the task of getting a full understanding of what was and had been going on. His head swam with the explanations that had been offered. He knew all about the uptown movement of the retail trade; the tremendous increase in expenses, due to higher rents — to this cause and that.

But he knew other things, too. He knew that he had been willing, indeed eager, to fall in with the suggestions that had been made to him after his father's death. He had been delighted to incorporate Lansing's, to become a dummy — despite his stock interest in the company — to let a corporation try to step into his father's shoes. He had justified himself by the knowledge that he couldn't fill them himself, and he had no reason now to think that he had been wrong as to that. But — he knew that he ought to have tried.

His father, build-



ing up Lansing's from a mite of a retail business to the great estate of its palmy days, had faced worse crises than this one that had ended in the bankruptcy court. He hadn't had anything to start with; much less the great business that had come to his son. His name was still one of the great ones of American mercantile history. He had been one of those pioneers, one of those captains of industry about whom that history was written, who had helped to prove that America was the land of opportunity. He had taken his place in the company of men like Carnegie, Rockefeller, Mackay, Armour, and scores of others like them, who, in greater or lesser degree, had taken toll of the country's needs.

It was of such men as Robert Lansing's father that Kipling wrote:

He turns a keen untroubled face
Home, to the instant need of things.
He greets th' embarrassed Gods, nor fears
To shake the iron hand of fate
Or match with Destiny for beers.

But no poet was ever going to be inspired to write thus of the man Robert Lansing had been, and he knew it. It had taken this catastrophe to

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drive the truth home, though he had been sensing it vaguely for a long time, with a growing restlessness and dissatisfaction with the manner of his life. Now this half-formulated complaint he had been making against himself was brought suddenly, by the force of outward circumstances, into a sharp, clear focus. He could express his feeling now, if he couldn't see a remedy, nor, even, exactly what had been responsible. And he guessed that he couldn't have gone on much longer in the old way, even if Lansing's had not gone under.

He quickened his step, to keep pace, in some measure, with the turmoil in his brain. There was no special need for haste. The failure of Lansing's, of course, was going to represent the dropping of a pretty big pebble into the placid pool of his life, and the ripples were going to have their effect. But not just yet. This was none of your melodramatic failures, that transform a man from millions and their surroundings in the first act to a Bowery lodging house in the second. He would have some money left; quite a good deal, indeed, according to ordinary standards. And he hadn't come yet to the point of planning changes in the routine of his life. That is one of the last

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things people do, anyway, after such an experience.

And so Lansing's mind wandered off at a tangent, for a moment, from the big fact of the failure, and he thought of his engagements for the next few days. Some of them he would probably have to break, he thought, and he frowned as he tried to plan out his time. Then the futility of this overcame him, and he laughed in the face of an imposing lady shopper who was bearing down upon him. He heard her muttering as he passed; she thought, perhaps, that he was trying to flirt with her.

He was still in Sixth Avenue, and he glanced up at the street signs to see if he had reached the point at which he wanted to turn east to reach his rooms. He hadn't, and kept on, to be caught in a sudden outpouring from the doors of a five-cent theater, colorful, in its garish way, with the bright posters that bore witness to the delights to be flashed on the screen within. He caught himself wondering how, in such a neighborhood, such a place could attract so many people of leisure; and, because he couldn't move quickly, he took note of the people who were coming out.

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It was nearly five o'clock, and that added to his wonder, since working hours weren't over. He saw women, women of all sorts; women with their arms full of bundles, in their eyes a remote, happy look, a little fixed — joint product of the romance of the films and the eye strain of steady watching — well-dressed women and slatternly, slovenly women, many of them pulling excited children along. But they were shoppers, in the main, and they were hurrying now, with their bundles, toward elevated and tubes, to rush home and fulfill their task of cooking dinner for the breadwinners. But though Lansing saw these things, they meant nothing to him yet. He saw them without understanding, obsessed only with the idea of getting through the press of people that had suddenly barred his swift progress.

That was soon done. The women scattered to their cars, and he forgot his glimpse of something that was new enough, full enough of meaning, to interest him, had he been able to read that meaning, to translate it into terms of opportunity. He went on for two more blocks, turned east, and in five minutes reached his rooms. From the depths of his easiest chair a cheerful voice greeted him.

“Hello Bob, lucky you came!” it said. “I couldn’t have waited much longer, you know. Had to send your man out for more cigarettes as it was.”

“What’s up, Sandy?” asked Lansing resignedly. In his mood, Alexander Brangwyn, who couldn’t begin to live up to that sonorous name, was not welcome. But the effort that would be required to make Sandy understand that, without a resort to downright brutality, was beyond him. It was easier to yield.

“Job for you,” said Sandy brightly. “Crowd getting up a show for some bloomin’ charity. Theatricals, you know — play by some blighter called Pinero, or some such name. Got a fellow I heard of to show ’em how. An’ he’s simply im-poss-ible!

“Told Mrs. Tommy French she didn’t know how to behave in a drawin’-room! Quite right, of course — she doesn’t. But she wouldn’t stand it — from him. He chucked it — an’ they were in a fine hole till I thought of you. So I promised to get you to — stage it, they call it, don’t they? They’ll take things from you they wouldn’t hear of from some beastly professional. What?”

"Can't do it," said Lansing shortly. "I'm sorry, Sandy — but it's out of the question."

"Eh?" said Sandy, staring. "But, I say, old chap — I promised, you know."

"Look at that!" said Lansing. He tossed over the paper he had carried home.

"Evening paper? What?" said Sandy, with the air of one announcing an important discovery. "Never read 'em. What's the idea, Bob?"

Lansing controlled himself, and explained.

"Too beastly bad, old chap," said Sandy, after taking it in. "But it just shows they have the right idea in England, you know. Over there this couldn't have happened. Why? Don't you see, you wouldn't have been in trade. It isn't done. Here — the very best people do it — and you see what happens."

He pondered over the disaster while Lansing became his debtor to the important extent of one sense of humor, hitherto badly frayed and unaccountably missing.

"I tell you what," he said, brightening again, "I'll lend you some money; then you can show them how to act their silly play."

But Lansing shook his head.

"No, thanks," he said. "It isn't as bad as that. Only, I've got to quit playing for a while, Sandy, and get my bearings. And I'm going to cut loose entirely — have a new deal."

There was a finality in his tone that silenced even Sandy. No one, and least of all Sandy himself, would have guessed that this decision was less than a minute old.

"I've got to do that," Lansing broke out suddenly. "Sandy — can't you see what an awful ass I've been? What the devil do I amount to? I can draw well enough to have women ask me to do place cards for their dinners — but I couldn't get a job doing picture postals for money. I could help out your charity theatricals — but a manager would kick me out of his theater after I'd tried to stage one act of a Broadway show. I can half do a dozen other things — and what do they come to? I'm nothing but an amateur."

"You come along with me," said Sandy firmly. He got up and took Lansing's arm. "I know what's the matter with you, old chap — liver. I'm going to order your dinner for you tonight — and I'll mix the cocktails myself."

Once more, it was easier to yield than to resist.

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And Lansing liked the fat little man; he didn't want to hurt his feelings. Then, he had to eat dinner — why not with Sandy?

Sandy, turned autocrat, chose a restaurant, not a club, and a restaurant comparatively strange to Lansing, a place that was full of men, and reeked, even so, of Broadway. But it boasted, as Sandy explained, a cook who was master of just the dishes Lansing needed, and a bar that was stocked with mysterious liquors vital to the cocktail that was part of the prescription. Lansing obeyed without questioning; the cocktail, as a matter of fact, restored some of his self-respect. He began to feel a little sorry for himself.

There were men all around whom Lansing knew. Some only nodded; several came over to his table, and, haltingly, spoke, with sympathy and regret, of the failure of Lansing's. But the one of all those whom Lansing knew best said nothing at all. This was Hazen, a lawyer, his senior by twenty years. He joined them for his coffee, and talked of trifling things until Sandy brought up the failure. Lansing rather hung on his answer; after the sympathy of the others he had been disposed to resent Hazen's silence.

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"I don't know," said Hazen reluctantly. "You can work out a reorganization, can't you, Lansing?"

"It's too late for that," said Lansing, with a renewed touch of bitterness. "The competition's too fierce. If you're once down you'd better stay, nowadays. My father —"

He stopped, gloomily thoughtful.

"Well?" said Hazen quietly. "I knew your father. He weathered some severe storms."

"Things were different then," retorted Lansing. "Those were the days of opportunity. There were chances, then. Things waiting to be done. Now everything's been done, or is being done. It's a case of working away in the rut you get into —"

"So?" Hazen had snatched the chance for a long, keen look at Lansing. "You think the great days of opportunity here are over?"

"Aren't they?" asked Lansing. "Everything's standardized; the country's settled; it's grown up. There's no West any more — just for one thing. Do you suppose a man could do now what Rockefeller did with oil, or Carnegie and that Pittsburgh crowd with steel?"

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"Do you suppose any one—except themselves, perhaps—thought they could do what they did, when they were getting started?" Hazen answered question with question.

Lansing didn't answer. And Hazen, after a moment's pause, went on.

"There's a good deal left to do," he said cheerfully. "And, as to the store, there'll be a reorganization, of course, whether you're in it or not. Feeling as you do, you'd better stay out of it, I should think. But you're going to do something, I take it?"

"Oh, yes! I'll wait till I see what there is left. If they reorganize, I suppose I'll get some cash."

"Very likely," said Hazen. "And you had a good deal of stuff outside of the store?"

"I had—yes. I've thrown most of it to the wolves, though, lately. You know, it looked as if some cash would save the store. So I put up about every decent security I had. In fact, I've only got one small block of stock left. I wouldn't have thought of that if I hadn't found a dividend check tonight before Sandy dragged me here. It's some Western Film the governor must have bought to oblige a friend. I supposed it wasn't

any good when I was checking up the stuff, and left it out."

"Western Film?" said Hazen curiously. "I didn't know any was loose. How much?"

"Only a few shares — I've forgotten just how many. It's no good, is it?"

"Hard to tell," said Hazen. "Depends on a lot of things."

"Oh, I say," protested Brangwyn, "can't we talk about somethin' interestin'? I brought old Bob here to forget business. Who's that big boulder over there at the round table — the chap with the bald head?"

"That?" Hazen looked across the room. A good many eyes were centering on that table just then. The man who had attracted Brangwyn's attention was spectacular enough to explain the interest he aroused. A great figure of a man, he seemed to tower, even as he sat at table, leaning far back, his voice raised in a roaring note that extinguished hopelessly any attempt of his companions to speak except at his sufferance. From time to time he brought a huge fist crashing down on the cloth, setting silver and glass to dancing.

"That's Jim Hazzard," said Hazen, with a

smile. "You might ask him about your Western Film stock, Bob. He's the big man in that concern. And — well, he might serve as a living answer to some of your other questions, too — about the opportunities one can still find. Five years ago he was running a saloon in Chicago, and just about breaking even. Today you'll find him rated in Bradstreet at a million and a half."

A man may have a good many more millions than one and a half and still not be worth a second glance. But that isn't so of a man who has *made* that much money in five years. Lansing stared, frankly, openly, with a dawning wonder in his eyes.

"You mean to say he's made that — out of moving pictures?" he asked. "But — look here — that dividend check — it didn't represent more than four per cent, and it's the first that's ever been paid on the stock —"

Hazen shrugged his shoulders.

"You might ask him about that, too," he suggested. "You want to remember he's on the inside. The men on the ground floor don't have to depend on dividends. They've got other ways of getting money, if they control the stock."

"Yes — that's so," said Lansing. He continued to stare at Hazzard, absorbed, fascinated. "And perhaps my father thought of going into that game in earnest — of getting to be an insider? Maybe that was why he had that stock — as an opening wedge?"

"Your father was a pioneer," said Hazen. "He wasn't in the habit of staying on the outside."

"I know," said Lansing. He drew in a deep breath. There came over him, with an astonishing vividness, a memory of that outpouring of women from the five-cent theater in Sixth Avenue that he had seen that afternoon. He had a vision of such theaters in other streets. He remembered the electric signs, the garish colored posters, glimpsed from automobiles in which he had ridden through the swarming streets of the East Side, the residential sections far uptown, with their miles of apartment houses in serried rows.

"Look here!" he said suddenly. "I was going to try to sell that stock — I thought maybe that dividend would make a market. But if my father thought there was something in the business —"

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"I heard it estimated the other day," said Hazen musingly, "that five or six million people go to see moving pictures every day in America, in about seven thousand theaters."

"They're welcome," said Sandy, with a chuckle. "I say — we've got time to take in a show, there's a new one at the Casino."

"No," said Lansing, "let's go to the movies. I want to see what there is in this game. Maybe it's going to be mine."



CHAPTER II

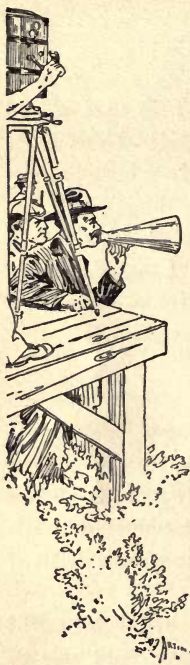
IT was not wholly Lansing's fault that he had come to what passes as maturity with so vague an understanding of life. He had been the victim of circumstances, and of the driving necessity that raises a barrier between so many American business men and their sons. Lansing's father had been infinitely more successful as a merchant than as a father. He had commenced life in very moderate circumstances.

Springing from a good, sound stock, that had given good citizens to the country, but citizens contented with the sphere in which they found themselves, he had been stirred from his earliest boyhood by ambition, by the determination to lift himself out of the rut in which he seemed destined to live.

The elder Lansing's career had been called meteoric by men who should have been able to understand it better. He himself had acquiesced in that false definition to some extent, because it

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was so flattering to a pride that was very natural, very easy to understand and to excuse. He had



won his way, as a matter of fact, because he had two infinitely precious natural gifts — the ability to work as hard as was necessary to attain a desired end, and, what was infinitely rarer and more precious even than that, an absolutely clear vision.

His son had been born during the long phase of transition, when the elder Lansing was engaged in the process of transforming his business from one local in scope to one that was, in the end, a national institution. With the best will in the world, he could not have devoted himself to bringing up his son to follow in his own footsteps.

The demands of his business were too exacting. It seemed to him safe to take it for granted that

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his success was the result of inherent qualities, reasonably certain to be reproduced in his son. He did not take into account the part that the environment of his boyhood had played in the development of those qualities in himself. He did not ask himself why those qualities, assuming them to have been latent in his father and in the men of still earlier generations, had suddenly been aroused to a fierce and active life in him.

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He did not stop to ask himself whether that miracle, to which he traced his own achievement, would have occurred had ambition not been aroused in him by the absence, during his most impressionable years, of things he wanted and needed. He gave an incredibly small portion of his thoughts to his son, for that matter. Robert Lansing, as a boy, was wholly and comfortably normal. His school reports were good; he kept out of scrapes. It was very easy for his father to dismiss him from his mind; to rest in the comfortable belief that he was a good, promising boy, who would grow up and be a credit to his name.

Robert Lansing, therefore, had developed very much as he himself chose. He had selected his own college; he had followed the studies that interested him. His ambitions were real enough, but they were wholly different from those that had urged his father to commercial conquest. Those ambitions, in his father, had been created, very largely, by sheer want, by the lack of things that others had. When he was old enough to have a definite notion of what he wanted from life, the son realized that provision had been made for the satisfaction of his wants; that he himself

need do nothing to secure them. Inevitably, since he was without the creative talent that might have made him an artist of some sort, he drifted into the ranks of the dilettantes.

His father's early death, leaving him rich and unoccupied, since he had no training to fit him for the task of managing his property, and had enough native wit to see that he would only hamper and obstruct the work of the men who were in active charge, removed the last and only obstacle that might have checked this drift.

Lansing settled down, accordingly, to a pleasant and aimless sort of existence. As he had tried to make Sandy Brangwyn see, he was an amateur. He could do half a dozen things passably well. He was artistic, without being in any sense of the word an artist. He had played fairly hard; he had never worked at all. Until this smashing blow had come, there had been nothing to rouse a real ambition in him.

He had lived, largely, among people like himself. Some inherited quality, some harder strain within him, had saved him from an insidious peril that might have given permanence to the harm that had been wrought. He had never taken the

people he knew best quite seriously. There had been moments always when he laughed at them, when he regarded them with a certain degree of cynicism. He had had, always, a veiled and really subconscious contempt for the men; a similar and equally unadmitted pity for the women. In these feelings he had included himself, and he had recognized, in moments of frank and uncomfortable introspection, the inherent futility of his own determination to quit fooling, some time, and do something worth while. He had known how improbable it was that he would ever realize that determination.

Women had never touched his life greatly. His ideals regarding them were high, and the women he knew, while he found them charming, delightful to play with, had all failed to embody those ideals. He looked for something in them that they seemed not to possess. Later, when he thought of those days, he saw that he had treated them with something less than justice; that the shortcoming might have been on his side, and that it had been unfair for him to expect these women to reveal to him something he had shown no ability whatever to understand.

But, whatever the reason, and whether it was his fault or that of the women he had known, Lansing had never really been in love. He had had his moments, prolonged moments at times, of illusion. But he had always awakened from his dream; disillusionment had always come, and sex had played a small, indeed a negligible, part in his life.

Lansing thought of these things, now that it was so clear to him that he would have to dig a new channel for his life. Looking back, he could see all that had gone before in an entirely new perspective. It amazed him to see how shallow, how narrowly bound, the old channel had been. And this vision helped him greatly. It took much of the sharpness from the sting of the wound that the failure had dealt him.

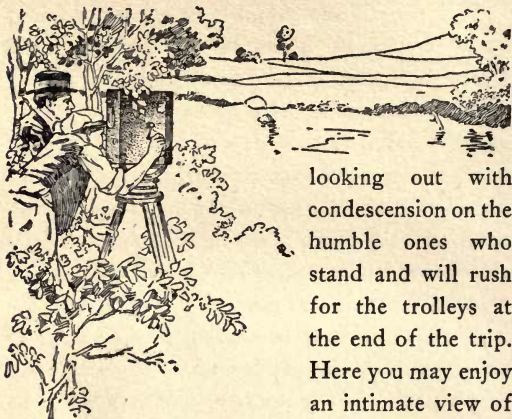
Some time, he knew, he would have looked back, as he was doing now, and the futility, the emptiness, of life, as he had lived it, would have been revealed to him, as it was being revealed now. There was nothing to regret about what he was forced to leave behind. After all, he could be thankful for the blow that had forced him to strike a balance sheet.

CHAPTER III

WHERE the guns of the twin forts of Washington and Lee once swept the Hudson, barring the ascent of the river by the British during the Revolution, history has been made again in these latter days — the history of a new industry. Fort Lee is as great a name in the chronicles of the movies as it was in those of the Continental army. On top of the Palisades wild deeds are done daily. Within easy gunshot of the metropolis of America, that wild land on top of the crags that overlook the Hudson is a treasure house for the men who make moving pictures. A good director will find there almost any scene he wants. He can achieve the local color for Western prairies, for forest romance, for the battlefields of half the world. The most realistic pictures of the Canadian Northwest that were ever made were taken there, but a few feet of film had to be cut out, now and then, when the careless camera man had allowed the great gas tank across the river, on the New York shore, to appear.

The ferry from Manhattan carries a daily army of invasion, bound for the studios. They are a friendly lot, most of them, gathering in jolly groups. But some there are, every day, whose eyes are full of care. These are the extra people, doomed as yet to make their daily pilgrimage in search of work, as likely to go on a vain errand to the Universal studio at Coytesville and find that only a society drama, with no extras, is being made, as to the Pathé plant at Fort Lee, where a frantic director may be tearing his hair because he has suddenly decided he needs a hundred extra people, and only a dozen have appeared. It is as difficult as it ever was to be in two places a mile apart at one and the same moment, and it is seldom, indeed, that a movie director will condescend to say, a day ahead, what his future needs will be.

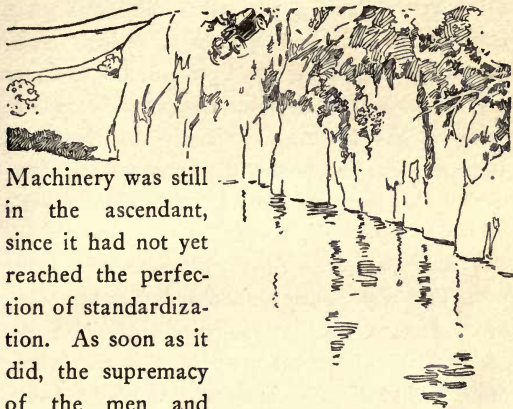
And so there is something wistful, pathetic, often, about these stragglers and camp followers of the army, just as there is something pleasing about the great mass of privates in the ranks, those who are regularly employed in small parts. But then there are the aristocrats, too. You can see these lolling in their automobiles, nowadays, for the day of great salaries has come to the movies,



looking out with condescension on the humble ones who stand and will rush for the trolleys at the end of the trip. Here you may enjoy an intimate view of some favorite of the films, smoking a cigarette or dabbling at her face with a powder puff, as the case may be.

But the day of automobile salaries was only just beginning to dawn when Lansing made his first trip on the eight-o'clock boat to begin his practical study of the movies. The movies were attracting audiences by virtue of their novelty. The mere fact that the pictures moved seemed to be almost enough. The era of tremendous competition, with the exploitation of personalities, was coming, had begun, indeed. But it hadn't arrived.

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Machinery was still in the ascendant, since it had not yet reached the perfection of standardization. As soon as it did, the supremacy of the men and women who could use that machinery best would be assured; actors and actresses, producers, would stand out as individuals, and their names would mean something to those who maintained the industry by their tributes of nickels and dimes.

It was like that, of course, with the automobile. In the early days, when Daimler and Benz and Haynes and Selden were laying the foundations, the great thing was that a wagon could be made to move without being drawn by horses. Just as with the pictures, the fundamental fact of motion was the all-sufficient, essential thing. With some-

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thing approximating perfection came the great days of the individual, the era of racing. Then men who couldn't have told you whether Daimler was a new sort of apple or an operatic composer knew all about the achievements of Lancia and Barney Oldfield, and had the history of the Vanderbilt Cup and the French Grand Prix at the end of their tongues.

Lansing had let no grass grow under his feet after that night when he had seen Jim Hazzard. He had been able to see through the grossness, the coarse shell of the man, to the smooth-working brain behind the cold, blue eyes. He had sensed, as he studied Hazzard, his oneness with his father, with those other seizers of opportunity. But he might have done that and been no nearer to seeing that the same opportunity that Hazzard had seized upon lay within his grasp, too. He had gone farther. The very fact that the thing surprised him held a suggestion that was full of meaning — that and his instant reversion to the moment when he had been caught in the crowd of women from the nickelodeon in Sixth Avenue.

Why hadn't he known about the movies? Why hadn't he, himself, fallen under a spell that held

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so many millions of people every day? And how about Hazen and Brangwyn? They didn't go to the movies, nor did his other friends. Yet he and his friends weren't exceptional people. They shared all sorts of entertainments with these people who made up the audiences of the nickel theaters. The only difference was that he and Brangwyn sat in two-dollar orchestra seats while these others looked down from the upper balconies. A show, to be really successful, had to appeal to orchestra and galleries alike. He caught the analogy, and thought about it. And, because, to think intelligently, he had to have a lot of facts, he set to work to take the moving-picture industry apart and see what made its wheels go round.

He had gone at his task in a cold, driving way that would have surprised Sandy Brangwyn and others of his older friends vastly. It surprised him, for that matter. But in the turmoil, the sickening work of watching the liquidation and winding up of Lansing's, it meant a good deal to have something that kept him busy, something that represented, in a way, a bridge between the dead, useless past and the future in which he hoped really to live.

There had been much for him to learn. He rediscovered things about himself, half forgotten — his need for exact knowledge. He inherited that from his father, who had applied a scientific mind to trade. In six weeks of digging he learned more things about the making of moving pictures than Jim Hazzard, with his million and a half that was still growing, would ever know. He had the history of the film, of the camera, with the vital sprocket, at his command. He revived an old interest in photography and made a study of the science of it that would have been amusing if it hadn't been so passionately earnest.

And, day after day, night after night, whenever he had a spare hour, he was in moving-picture theaters. He watched the films at first, but soon he was more interested in the people who sat around him. He watched three or four successive runs of a picture, to study the impression it made upon wholly different types in the audiences. He analyzed the appeal of every sort of picture, filled endless sheets of paper with notes, and then tore them up, filing away his conclusions mentally.

He laughed at himself, sometimes. Jim Hazzard hadn't done this sort of thing, nor, so far as

he knew, had any of the other big men of the industry. Perhaps they hadn't felt the need. But he did. He had a curiously logical mind, that demanded exactitude. All the time he was making plans vaguely. And all the time he knew that they would remain in that vague state until he had his foundation of exact knowledge properly built. Again, his heritage from his father was striking out. One who watched him, and had known the elder Lansing, would have understood, remembering how Robert Lansing's father had understood every detail of his business, so that he could show a boy the best way to wrap a spool of thread, the clerk in the shipping room the easiest, quickest way to box a dinner set, a salesgirl exactly the way to send a customer away with the feeling of satisfaction in the service of the store that would make her return.

Financially, Robert Lansing suffered less than he might have done from the failure of the great store. There had been a reorganization, abruptly halting the receivership and the forced sales. Other interests had stepped in, seizing avidly the chance of a sharp bargain. There had been a compounding with creditors, an assumption, by

the new owners of certain contracts and great debts. Lansing hadn't been vitally interested. He had turned his own interests over to Hazen, and had accepted, with astonished gratitude, the lawyer's report of what had been saved from the wreck. There was a good deal more money left than he had expected — nearly eighty thousand dollars. Conservatively invested, that would represent a comfortable income, enough to let him go on very much as before, with certain easily effected economies. But he was in no mood for conservative investments, and he was too busy to worry about the things he had stopped doing, important as they had seemed before. He abandoned luxurious rooms and service without a qualm, and buried himself in a two-room apartment far uptown, where he cooked his own breakfast and had an arrangement with the janitor's wife to make his bed and sweep his rooms for a weekly pittance. The bulk of his money he banked, leaving it instantly available for the grasping of the opportunity he had determined to make for himself out of this new-born moving-picture industry.

More and more, as he had studied the business,

Lansing had been absorbed and obsessed by the great, dominating figure of Jim Hazzard. Not that Hazzard was, at this time, the greatest figure in the industry. Half a dozen men were richer, on the surface; at least, bigger. But he felt that Hazzard was still growing, moving, reaching out for greater things than any of them had yet touched. That was why, with his theoretical knowledge fairly assembled, Lansing would have selected one of Hazzard's studios as his destination on the morning of his first trip across the Fort Lee ferry, even had he not held his few shares of Hazzard's stock. He wanted to get in touch with the vital force that Hazzard was contributing to the actual making of the pictures. And so he was on his way, without introduction, as casually, on the surface, as any of the other camp followers, to look for work as an extra, at the two or three dollars a day that such work commanded.

Lansing had covered a good deal of ground since the day he had been caught in the crowd in Sixth Avenue without any understanding of its significance. On the ferryboat, he was vastly interested in the people he saw. He tried to guess

what sort of parts these men and women played, or hoped to play. He watched them as they spoke to one another; picked out, first one, then another, and both watched and listened shamelessly to see how facial expression interpreted and colored what they were saying.

And then, by pure chance, his eyes fell on a slim, pale girl who stood apart from the others. Like him, she was watching them, with an intent, tremendous interest she made no effort to conceal. She leaned forward, and her eyes wandered back and forth from one group to another. Her eyes were deep set, of a dark gray, that gave them the most curious emphasis. Strictly speaking, she was not beautiful. Lansing, with his new trick of observation, understood that — and studied her, almost with irritation, to find out what it was that made it so impossible to overlook her, even in this crowd.

For just a moment he thought it was her pallor and her eyes. Then, again, he decided that he had been wrong, that, after all, she was beautiful. But her features, taken one by one, disproved that. They weren't in accord, somehow, with the slim grace of her body, and his eyes wandered, incon-

sequently, to her hands and feet, which were. Then he caught the secret. There were moments, when something interested her, when her beauty was in the ascendant. But that was due to the astonishing mobility of her face, its extraordinary expressiveness. For he could see, when her face was in repose, the faint thickening of every line. Her nostrils were just a hint too broad, and her nose itself, straight enough, had not the thin, delicate line that beauty demands. So with her lips. Parted, one would not notice that thickening, not so pronounced as to suggest coarseness. But when her mouth was still it was there. And yet that clumsiness of modeling that robbed her of the beauty she had so nearly achieved was what gave her the expressiveness, the quick reflection of each trifling change of mood or impression that was her great attraction.

Lansing fell into a brown study as he stared at her, so that he saw, after a moment, not the girl herself, but the mental image of her that he had recorded. And then, with a start, he came to himself, and found that her eyes were fixed on him, that she was appraising his stare. They fell away at once, but not before he had seen and under-

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stood the thought that was back of her eyes. She was wondering at him and his curious stare, trying to analyze it, to determine whether she need fear him, or resent his scrutiny. At that he smiled, very faintly, to himself, but he was filled, too, with a sense of pity that was not quite dispelled when the boat bumped against the piles of the slip, and he turned eagerly shoreward, with the feeling that he had come to a landing on the coast of adventure.



CHAPTER IV

THE coast of adventure it was, perhaps. But it was a barren, rock-bound sort of coast, as forbidding, one might guess, as that upon which the Pilgrims landed in New England. It may have been that thought that made Lansing stick to his quest, too, for more than once, after his landing, sick and disgusted, he was on the point of giving up and looking elsewhere for his opportunity.

In the rush from the ferryhouse to the waiting trolley cars, Lansing brushed against the girl, and shied off at once. Yet they met, two minutes later, in the middle of a car they had boarded at opposite ends, and he caught the girl biting her lips as she repressed a faint smile. She had decided by this time, evidently, that his scrutiny called neither for fear nor for resentment.

The car took them all, regulars and extra people alike, up the Palisades, in a winding course made necessary by the steep ascent. At a junction, on the level plain above, the delegations for the

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different studios began to scatter, but Lansing and the girl were bound for the same destination. When they reached the end of the run of the second car they alone survived of the unattached group. The others had tried their luck at different studios. Up in the front of the car, a little group of half a dozen were headed for the Western studio, too, it seemed; when the car stopped, the girl let them lead the way up the hill, and Lansing, hoping she knew the ropes, brought up the rear of the procession. Here, at the very start, with all his theoretical knowledge of the films, he was in practical difficulties. He realized suddenly that he didn't know how to ask for work, didn't have an idea of the routine.

The girl did, however, and showed it by the assurance of her movements and her manner. Lansing's first glimpse of the studio showed him a high, long fence, behind which he saw canvas backs of "sets" — scenery placed outdoors. It was like coming to the stage of a theater from the wings. Then came an overgrown conservatory, all of glass, and beyond that a structure that looked like a barn or a converted livery stable. Into this the actors disappeared who led the van,

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and Lansing hastened his steps a little as he saw the girl follow them. By the time he got inside the girl alone was left. She sat down quietly just outside a gate, and, after he had read a forbidding sign, directed especially to "extras," Lansing followed suit.

But he did it with a chill that affected his enthusiasm for the whole adventure most adversely. Was this any way to do business? There was not even an office boy to take note of their presence; just a sign that forbade all who were not cast to pass the gate. From within there came sounds of life. Talk, laughter, occasionally loud-voiced inquiries for this person or that, the sound of furniture being dragged about.

Lansing wasn't used to waiting. It made him restless, and he got up, after a few minutes, and began to pace the little waiting hall. A dozen people would have crowded it; that was a grievance, too, though there was room enough, certainly, for the girl and himself. She watched him for a minute with amused eyes, then said,

"This your first time?"

He swung around, and his hat came off. His first impression was one of annoyance. No girl

as pretty as this one should have such a voice! It was unmusical, rough, untrained. But it was a kindly question, of course. And her voice explained why she had recourse to the movies, when the stage seemed to be her vocation.

"Yes," he answered. "Is this the usual thing? Does one always have to sit down and wait like this?"

"It all depends," she told him. "I've waited here for three hours, sometimes. But then, again, you're likely to be called in right away. You never can tell."

"That's a fine way to do business," said Lansing, in great disgust. "I shouldn't think they'd get many people to come for work, at that rate."

"Oh, well!" She shrugged her shoulders slightly. He noticed that it was a trick of hers to make a gesture serve the ends of speech whenever she could. "Hello — here's some one now — Haines, I think."

A young man, coatless, his sleeves rolled up, perspiring, exuding energy as well as moisture, came down the hall that had been made by boarding off partitions. His gait was half a walk, half a run.

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"Extras!" he bawled, as he approached. "Who's here? Oh —" And he swore.

He came to a halt and surveyed them disgustedly.

"Beat it inside, Brewster!" he said to the girl. "Street stuff — get a wop costume."

She departed, with a faint smile thrown at Lansing as she went. Haines, the director, glared at Lansing.

"Greenhorn?" he snapped. "Any experience?"

"Yes! No!" said Lansing, answering both questions, and glared back.

"All right — I'll have to use you today, anyhow," said Haines. "Dick!"

A lean youth, with sagging shoulders, emerged from a cubby-hole beyond the gate.

"Dick, phone and see if you can't scare me up a dozen extras from around for that street scene. Then take this guy's name and show him how to get ready. Shoot him along when he's fixed."

He disappeared. Dick crooked a finger, and Lansing, raging inwardly, followed him. He waited while Dick telephoned to three or four studios, in a complaining, singsong voice.

"Come along!" said Dick; then, "gee — it's always the same way. When we don't need any extras we can't walk without stepping on 'em — when we do, there won't be any."

"Why not let them know ahead?" suggested Lansing.

"Gee — how's the boss know what he's going to make till he gets ready?" Dick asked. "Here y'are — pick out one of them wop outfits and get into it, quick! Better darken your eyes a bit, too, and wipe some stuff on your lips. Know how?"

Lansing did know how. His success in amateur theatricals implied that sort of knowledge. He applied pencil and lip stick quickly and skillfully; then donned the costume of an Italian of Mulberry Bend with a careless, but effective attention to details like tie and sash that won Dick's approval. And then he followed Dick to a place that made him think of an insane asylum he had once visited.

For the first time, he saw a picture in the process of making. Clouds had darkened the sky for a time, so an indoor scene was being made. Under a battery of vacuum lights, casting a ghastly, greenish-white glare that annihilated shadows,

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three or four principals were rehearsing a scene. Haines, a script clutched in his hand, sat astride a chair before the camera, barking out his instructions that governed every movement, every gesture, every shade of expression of the actors. Two minutes of observation left Lansing with an overwhelming impression — the utter destruction of individuality that was involved in this process. It was Haines who did everything.

The actors didn't know what they were doing. Blindly, dumbly, they obeyed orders. Haines alone knew the meaning of what they did. In his mind alone were all the scattered threads of the story that was being enacted, brought together. A cast that included Bernhardt and Duse, Sothorn and Forbes-Robertson, couldn't have interpreted that photo play, since Haines gave his puppets no inkling of the emotions, the desires that belonged to the characters they played.

"You come in, Deane," he would say to the leading woman. "Look at the picture and register grief."

And Mary Deane, a pretty, insignificant blonde, obeyed. But the grief that distorted her features carried no conviction. She registered grief be-

cause Haines told her to do so; not because, interpreting the rôle of the heroine, she imagined herself, for a moment, as suffering whatever it was that the scenario called upon that character to endure.

So it went. The girl he knew as "Brewster" came in, transformed, somehow, by her make-up and her costume, and looking, to his eyes, infinitely more like an actress and an artist than any of the much better-paid principals. Other extra people came straggling in, too, during the morning. Just before the brief luncheon interval, Lansing was called up, and worked before the camera for the first time. His part made no demands on him; he had simply to form one of a crowd that denounced the driver of an automobile who had just run over a child. And yet, in this scene, something happened that made a great impression on him.

While it was being rehearsed, under the lash of the director's tongue, the gray-eyed girl suddenly detached herself from the crowd of extras, sank down, and, covering her face with her shawl, began to sob convulsively, her shoulders heaving. Haines saw her, leaped forward, then stopped.



*The gray-eyed girl
sank down, and,
covering her face with
her shawl, began to
sob convulsively*

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"That's good!" he cried sharply. "Repeat that — and take down your shawl afterward, and register grief. Look as if you were the kid's mother. We need something like that for this scene."

"Of course you did!" muttered Lansing to himself.

And afterward he approached the girl.

"How did you happen to break away from what he told us to do?" he asked her curiously.

"Oh, I don't know," she said. "I — I just sort of felt as if I really was a woman in a crowd like that — and I thought if I was I'd cry."

"I see," said Lansing thoughtfully.

It seemed to him afterward that that was the one bright spot of his whole day in the studio. It was the one instance of a genuine effort to act. Everything else was mechanical, the result of a narrow, prescribed routine. It was by a slavish adherence to routine that Haines got his effects. Lansing wasn't ready to question this. Haines might be right; probably he was. But, if he was, what hope could lie in the whole business? Marionettes, the Punch and Judy shows he had seen in France and England, offered as great a field as

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moving pictures of the sort Haines made. And yet — when Haines had the real thing thrown at him by the gray-eyed girl, he had recognized it, seized upon it avidly. Perhaps Haines knew the limitations of his people. Perhaps he had to work as he did with the material he had.

However that might be, Lansing had accomplished one thing, at least. He knew now, or thought he did, why the people who sat in the two-dollar seats of the theaters didn't fill the five- and ten-cent moving-picture houses — one of the reasons, at least.

"These people don't see what they've got," he said to himself, half contemptuously. "They're offering shoddy goods — cheap and nasty. They get the trade that has to have cheap stuff, and can't care how nasty it is as long as it is cheap. But that girl, now — I'm going to keep my eyes on her —"

Out of the very disgust that had repelled him at first he began, now, to get fresh inspiration. If things were wrong, if chances were being overlooked by these people, who, after all, had accomplished a great and conspicuous success, didn't that mean that his opportunity was all the greater?

If Jim Hazzard, with such methods underlying his business, had been able to make a fortune in five years, why shouldn't another man, profiting by Hazzard's mistakes, make a greater one?

It wasn't a standardized business he wanted to break into — what he needed was a chance to be a pioneer, as his father had been before him. He began to see the analogy, to understand a little better some of the things Hazen had said. And this was much more nearly a virgin field than the one his father had tilled with such great results. Men had been keeping store for centuries, but it had been left for Lansing's father and his contemporaries to revolutionize all the accepted methods and build up great fortunes by doing so. As for moving pictures, Hazzard had been in that business for five years, and was rated one of the pioneers — while a man who could go back to the dim beginnings, in the late nineties, was already an historic, almost a mythological, figure!

He watched Haines for the rest of the day with an amused sort of tolerance. And he did not neglect the girl with the gray eyes. He wondered how Haines could fail to see how immeasurably better than his leading woman was this almost nameless

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extra girl, who, even as a super, sank herself for the moment into the character she was playing. Lansing couldn't do that himself; self-consciousness, or something of the sort, made it impossible for him ever to enter into that state of illusion.

But his experience in amateur theatricals had taught him the value of that power, as well as its rarity. He knew that in nine cases out of ten it constituted the one great difference between amateur and professional. But he was glad Haines didn't see the girl's value. She was beginning to figure vaguely in even vaguer plans that were forming in Lansing's mind. When Dick made him write down his name and address, at the end of the day's work, in a big book in the office, he took the chance to glance at the girl's entry.

Mary Brewster she was called. She lived far uptown in New York. As soon as he was alone he wrote down name and address.



CHAPTER V

NO lad apprenticed in a medieval guild ever learned a trade more thoroughly than Lansing learned the new business of the movies in the weeks, fast growing into months, that followed his first contact with the actual making of a picture on top of the Palisades. Not for many days did he go back to Haines; meanwhile he had worked as an extra under almost every director of the colony that centered in Fort Lee. Then he took a long jump and saw the wholly different methods in use in California, where, instead of making exterior sets for camera work under glass and vacuum lights, the most elaborate interiors were set up outdoors, and every picture was made, from start to finish, in the clear, even sunshine of the coast.

He improved as an actor inevitably; any one would have done that. He won praise from directors, and more than one offer of a real job, with a place on the pay roll. But the glamour of the work, though it threatened to hold him

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more than once, never quite obscured his realization that behind the studios, behind the autocratic directors, behind the actors who were beginning to emerge from the anonymity of the earlier films, there were big, dominating figures like that of Jim Hazzard. It was those men who were creating the industry who appealed to him most; he



sought eagerly for every crumb of information as to their rise, delighting in the constant proof of the opportunities they had seen and seized.

The new industry, still in the pinafore stage, had its sagas already. It had no written history, but everywhere Lansing found men to tell him the things that the historian of the future will record. He heard of the first timid steps, when two fundamental inventions, that of the celluloid film and of the still rather mysterious camera, with its sprocket

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mechanism that made the rapid motion of the film possible, had enabled Edison and the Biograph pioneers to make the first crude pictures.

In those early days motion had been enough. Audiences had cheered in startled wonder at the sight of a moving train, a crowd walking along a street, a galloping horse. It was with such pictures, he heard, that J. Stuart Blackton and Albert E. Smith, then doing the stock tricks of magicians in vaudeville, had made their start. They made their first pictures themselves, on the roof of an old building in Nassau Street, and got a young real-estate broker, named William T. Rock, to finance their first experiments. He needed no one to tell him that those three were now the owners of the great Vitagraph Company — one of the undisputed leaders of the industry.

Everywhere the men with the long memories harked back to the epoch-making year of 1903, when E. S. Porter, of the Edison Company, produced the first real motion-picture drama — the famous "Great Train Robbery." In that picture, for the first time, a real story was developed and told on the film, acted out by real actors. And after that — the beginning of the deluge. He

heard that in Los Angeles, from an actor who had been in the films since the beginning, and was glad now to get extra work two or three times a week.

"And, my boy — here's a coincidence," said the actor. He pointed to a lean, sharp-faced man, with piercing eyes, that let no passer-by escape their scrutiny. "Do you see that man? That's Anderson — Broncho Billy!"

Lansing was interested at once. He had heard of the man who had first made the cowboy films popular, with a vogue that carried them clear around the world.

"Yes, sir," the actor went on, "that's Broncho Billy — G. M. Anderson, the A of Essanay — S an' A — see? Nerve! My boy, if I'd had his nerve I'd be a millionaire today! He was in that film I was telling you about — 'The Great Train Robbery.' And afterward he acted a lot. He got to know how the pictures ought to be made, you see. So he got a hunch. And he went out to Chicago and dug up a fellow he'd known a long time, G. K. Spoor. Spoor, he was making eye-glasses and things, just in a small way. Nice little business he had — salting away a thousand a year, I'd guess.

"Well, Anderson filled him up full of this

moving-picture game, and got him excited. So Spoor put up the money and they started Essanay, with Spoor to run the business and Anderson to see to the pictures, and act in 'em, too, in his cowboy parts. I guess you know the money they're making today.

"Nerve! That's the thing that's built this business up, my friend. There's C. J. Hite — Hite, of Thanhouser. Heard of him, haven't you? Well, he was running a lunch room in Chicago. He started one of the first independent exchanges — with his hat for an office, from all I hear. Rented films out to the little theaters, that the big trust exchanges wouldn't do business with at all. Gave up his lunch room — and that left Paul Davis out of his job as a waiter. But Paul didn't bear any hard feelings to Hite — and proved it, a bit later. Paul got a job with some big man in Chicago, and later on, when Hite got a chance to buy old man Thanhouser out, he met this fellow Davis, looking prosperous, and told him of his chance, and the money he needed to snatch it. So Paul got his boss to put up a hundred thousand dollars for Hite to play with! Hite's on his way to his million today."

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It seemed to Lansing that there was some such story about every man who had risen to the top. And about these stories there was one striking point of similarity. Every one seemed to hinge on the fact that its hero had looked ahead, had seen the great days that were coming, and had risked everything on his vision. They had all had nerve. Sigmund Lubin, in Philadelphia, giving up his life work in middle age — like Spoor, he had been a maker of optical instruments — had put himself and all his capital into the new business and reaped a great harvest. Carl Laemmle, abandoning a tailor shop in Milwaukee, had opened a nickel theater in Chicago, and gone on from step to step until he had built up the Universal corporation, controlling half a dozen brands of films and exchanges all over the country, in open rivalry of what all movie men called the trust.

He got the chronicle of Jim Hazzard, too. Hazzard appealed to many as he did to Lansing, to whom he seemed a true figure of romance, unromantic as was his personal appearance. He heard what Hazen had already told him; that Hazzard, five years or so before, had been the owner of a Chicago saloon. In connection with

his saloon, he had had a summer garden. And, to attract patronage to this, he had taken to showing films, getting old, worn prints that he could rent cheaply.

The response of his trade had startled him, and he had seen at once that what he intended as an advertisement was bigger than the thing he wanted to advertise. Unhesitatingly he had sold his business, grinning at the loss he had to bear, and plunged into the business of the pictures. He tried to build up an exchange business; found that the trust made such terms that there was no profit left for him, and began, in a small way, to make films that he could distribute on his own terms. One thing led to another; he found himself, before, perhaps, he quite realized what he was doing, in active opposition to the trust—made up, it may be well to explain, of the companies, now grouped together, that worked under a license from the owners of the basic camera patents.

Lansing, studying the rise of Hazzard, found himself always at a loss to know whether his success was due to genius or a sublime sort of luck; everything Hazzard had done had been so in-

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evitable a result of something that had gone before. The great Western Company itself was simply Hazzard's answer to the decree of the trust that his exchanges must handle only trust films.

So now three great rivals were fighting for control of the industry. Only in the Western group could Lansing see the domination of an individual; the trust and the other great independent group lacked personality, since they had no Hazzard. They had plenty of commanding figures, but Hazzard still remained in a class by himself. That, as a matter of fact, was because he appealed more especially to Lansing's instinct for organization. He wasn't as good a film man as a score of lesser figures. Lansing, indeed, knew more, as a result of his study of the business, than did Hazzard himself of the details that were vital in the actual conduct of affairs.

His California visit put the finishing touches on Lansing's self-education. He went East with the feeling that he knew, now, as much as he needed to enable him to plunge into the business. And yet, as fast trains carried him homeward, he was as far as ever from making up his mind as to how

to go in. He wanted to lead, not to follow; above all, he wanted to be independent. And it seemed to him that, despite the youth of the industry, he was too late to achieve either of those desires very fully. What was there to be done that had not been done already? Things might be better; there was an almost unlimited opportunity for improvement. But all a newcomer could do, after all, was to make pictures. And, as to independence — when he had made them they had to be marketed.

They had to reach the public — and the public sat before the screens of innumerable theaters, which got their films from the big exchanges, which were under control of one or the other of the great groups. His thinking was circular; he reminded himself, as he tried to work out his problem on the train, of a dog chasing his own tail. He was pretty low-spirited, indeed. It was one of those periods of discouragement and distrust of self that most men experience. He abused himself. He remembered his bitter self-condemnation after the failure of Lansing's and the things that he knew had been said about him.

It seemed to him that he, in that first bitter

and sharp fit of passionate regret for the time he had wasted, and the friends of his father who had sneered at him, had been wholly right. His sudden interest in moving pictures wasn't a symptom of acute and intelligent ambition, somewhat belated in its manifestation, but only the sort of reflex action that can be produced in any creature, even a mule, by a well directed and unexpected kick. Of course, the Lansing failure had stirred him up. But to what end? He knew all about the moving-picture industry now — or thought he did. And what good did that do him? He saw no way to apply his knowledge. The opportunities that had beckoned so plainly to Laemmle and Hite, Hazzard and Blackton, might still be present. But he couldn't see any of them. And so, for him, they didn't exist.

He was in the grip of that despondent mood when he got to Chicago. His train was late, and he missed his New York connection. That was chance, pure and simple; a whim of fate, or whatever you choose to call it. So was part of what followed.

There was no reason for Lansing to be in a hurry to reach New York, and he decided to

spend a day or two in Chicago, where there were friends he had not seen for a long time. He got to his hotel about midnight; the first face he saw in the lobby was that of Hazen, the lawyer, who had been the first to point Jim Hazzard out to him. There was nothing remarkable about this. Hazen's practice took him all over the country. He greeted Lansing with great friendliness, and then as he took in his appearance smiled, rather quizzically.

Lansing had changed a good deal since his last meeting with Hazen. The change had begun before he had gone West, manifesting itself in a certain indifference to things that had formerly seemed important. Lansing had been the pride of a fashionable tailor. Now he wore a suit that most obviously hadn't renewed its acquaintance with a pressing iron for many days, and that hadn't profited as a result. His shoes were dusty; his hat, a soft, slouchy panama, would have shocked his ex-valet. He looked bigger, too. He had filled out; his shoulders were broader and straighter. And his face and hands had been burned to a rich golden brown by the California sunshine. Hazen, noting the change, and grop-

ing mentally to describe it, got the exact word. Lansing looked more American.

"Thank heaven!" said Lansing. "Have you got anything to do?"

"I've got to go to bed," said Hazen, with a smile.

"Wrong! You've got to split a Welsh rabbit or a lobster with me and tell me if Broadway's still lighted up at night. You've got to — oh, just talk to me! I've been on the ragged edge of all the world for weeks."

"It's agreed with you," said Hazen dryly. "Been making a fortune? I noticed symptoms of trying to do that when I saw you last."

Lansing would have flushed if his coat of tan had not forbidden it.

"Don't talk about me," he said. "I'm a poor topic — and I'm sick of myself, anyhow. What's new in New York?"

Hazen talked gossip for a few minutes — and saw that Lansing's eyes wandered. Hazen hadn't acquired his commanding position in the law without wisdom and perception; he found it a little hard to suppress a chuckle.

"Seems pretty small, doesn't it?" he said

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sympathetically. "But it's as important as it ever was to your friend Brangwyn and the rest of them."

He had put his finger on the spot, and Lansing knew it. He was at loose ends. Hopelessly out of touch with the life he had led before the Lansing smash, he had nothing to take hold of now.

"You were interested in Jim Hazzard, weren't you?" said Hazen, seemingly at random. "He's in a peck of trouble."

"Trouble? How?" said Lansing, startled. One might almost have seen him prick up his ears.

"He's likely to lose control of Western Film. Haven't you heard that he's been fighting with Cramer and Howell?"

"I heard he was trying to force them out," said Lansing. "But — hasn't he got control? That's the general impression."

"He had it — just as long as Dave Sears was alive," said Hazen. "Sears was his original partner — Cramer and Howell came in later. He got them when he had to have real money, and it's always been the eighth wonder of the world

that those two pirates put up the cash without getting fifty-one per cent of the stock. I guess, if the truth were known, Jim managed to fool them some way — or else they found out that some one else was ready to put up the money if they didn't. And then, again, they may have thought they could handle Sears, who had just enough stock to swing the balance between them and Hazzard. Now Sears is dead — and Hazzard can't buy his stock."

Lansing's indifference had vanished. He was sitting up now, alert and keenly interested.

"How do you know?" he asked sharply.

"Because I happen to be counsel for Mrs. Sears," the lawyer answered. "There's no secret about it — a hundred men know the facts. Old Dave's will provided that his stock should be sold — I guess he understood that a woman, without any business training, needed something safer than Western Film as an investment. And it gave Hazzard first chance to buy the stock, with a time limit."

"Well — didn't he snap at it?" asked Lansing.

"Yes — the way a dog snaps at a bone that's just beyond his reach when he's chained up. He's

half crazy. But Cramer and Howell have got him this time — and if he put anything over on them before, they're getting good and even now. I told you Hazzard was rated at a million and a half. And he hasn't been able to raise fifty thousand in cash — which is what he's got to have to get that stock. His time's up tomorrow — at noon. Today, that is."

Lansing sat back and stared.

"And that means that the other two will get it?"

"Not a doubt in the world. They haven't been near me yet. But they're safe enough. No one would buy that stock except themselves — or Hazzard, of course. And they've seen to it that he's helpless. They've got Wall Street connections, and their own ways of keeping a man from getting hold of money if he's likely to interfere with them in using it. And Hazzard's tied up. He's the sort of man who won't let a dollar stay idle. A dollar in cash to him is just a basis of two dollars in credit."

"You're handling the Sears stock?" exclaimed Lansing.

"Yes — as executor. That's why I'm here.

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Selling that will wind up the estate, and his will was filed here for probate."

"If Cramer or Howell, or both of them, had come to you and asked for an option, in case Hazard didn't exercise his, you'd have given it to them?"

"I wouldn't have had any choice. The will leaves me no latitude about that stock."

Lansing took a dollar bill from his pocket and laid it on the table between them.

"A dollar's consideration enough in an option, isn't it?" he said. "Give me that option. I believe I can do as much with that stock as any one else. With what I've got already it means something. And — I'm ready to risk fifty thousand dollars on my hunch."

Hazen, astonished for once in his life, and unable to hide it, stared at him.

"You're crazy!" he said. "You can't graze in that pasture, Bob! You'd be a little white, woolly lamb in a pack of wolves! You haven't got enough money to sit in that game."

But Lansing's eyes were snapping, and his mouth had tightened into a straight, hard line.

"I'm making a bona-fide offer," he said. "You

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say yourself you've got no right to refuse it. And you're not looking out for my interests — your business is to sell that stock."

He got his option. Hazen stopped with the one remonstrance; he recognized, somehow, the futility of further protest. And Lansing, with his hat at a disgraceful angle, left the hotel, whistling, and sought the nearest telegraph office that was open all night. At the counter, he composed a long and explicit telegram to his New York bank. It contained none of the customary telegraphic abbreviations. Lansing determined to leave no room for error, since he desired a credit of fifty thousand dollars in Chicago well before noon. Noon in Chicago is one o'clock in New York; that gave a little more time for whatever formalities might be necessary. He was thankful for the foresight that had led him to make arrangements, before he left New York, for just such an emergency need of money. When he had done so, to be sure, he had contemplated nothing more than a possible accident, making the ability to draw a few hundred dollars quickly desirable. But, the arrangements once made, it was as easy to get fifty thousand as a hundred.

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For the first night in a week or more of severely critical self-examination, Lansing went to sleep almost as soon as his head touched the pillow. For good or evil, he had taken the same sort of plunge that men like Hazzard and Laemmle had taken. Like them, he had glimpsed an opportunity and had had the nerve to seize it. He might be right or wrong. Only the future could disclose that. And about the future he refused to worry. He had made his start!



CHAPTER VI

THE Whitestone Hotel looked like a moving-picture headquarters next morning. Lansing, finishing his coffee before nine o'clock, sat back and grinned to himself at the entrance of Hazzard. The big man drew all eyes to himself, as he always did. He couldn't help it; Lansing guessed that on this, of all days, he didn't want to do so. But he couldn't modify his bulk; seemingly he couldn't tone down the roar of his voice, either. And, if he was worried, his appetite appeared to be unaffected. A dyspeptic individual at the next table turned a little paler at the sight of Hazzard's breakfast: fruit, cereals, chops, eggs, bacon, a steak — pot after pot of coffee. Lansing, waiting for a telegram, stayed, with his cigar, to enjoy the sight — and got a little more in the way of entertainment than he had bargained for.

He was not far from Hazzard, who, of course, didn't know him. And the sight of the great veins in the big man's forehead, swelling up until they

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turned to an ominous purple, was his first warning that something strange was happening. A moment later he understood, as a waiter ushered two men, immaculate in summer garb of New York, to another near-by table. Howell and Cramer!



They saw Hazzard; feigned surprise and nodded cordially to him. Both were small, dapper men; both had shifty eyes, that refused to linger anywhere long enough for an observer to look through them. Aside from that, though, they had nothing in common. Yet both had the predatory look. And they couldn't quite conceal their contempt for Hazzard and his swelling, apoplectic rage.

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Enough food to have fed most men for a day still remained at Hazzard's place. Perhaps the sight of his enemies did finally curb his appetite, or he might simply have overestimated his needs. At any rate he heaved himself up from his chair and moved ponderously toward their table. Lansing leaned forward. Howell and Cramer were uneasy, but they held their ground. He saw Howell, who was facing Hazzard as he approached, say something; a greeting, he guessed, though he couldn't hear. Hazzard didn't speak. He moved on, came to rest at last, with his great hands on the table, which bent and swayed beneath his weight. For a full minute he stared at the pair. Lansing could see them wilt. Again Howell said something. And then Hazzard moved his hands, lowered his head menacingly.

"Bah!" he roared, and turned away.

A laugh ran around the room. Even the waiters joined for a moment. Little thrills chased up and down Lansing's spine. There was something superb about Hazzard's elemental wrath, about his supreme contempt for these men who had beaten him. He took his defeat hard, but he took it as a boy might have taken it, with a fine, unso-

phisticated disregard for the convention that calls for a seeming indifference to such a blow. Yet there was nothing boyish, but, on the contrary, something incredibly menacing, about his eyes — something that spoke eloquently of his confidence that another day, another chance, were coming to him.

Hazzard was gone. Something electric, tonic, went out of the room with him. It left Howell and Cramer looking amazingly cheap and small and tawdry. They tried to perk up at once, to laugh at the man who had scorned them so. But they couldn't do it. Lansing, any one else who chose to look at them, could see what a mockery it was. They were disconcerted, furiously angry, at Hazzard, at themselves, at one another. In less than a minute they were arguing viciously together. Lansing smiled. He took out his option, read it through, and smiled again. As he went out into the lobby he passed, deliberately, the table where they sat. They didn't look like powerful men, men who had been able to beat the mighty Jim Hazzard. But he knew their power, and he wondered what his relation with them was going to be when they knew the truth.

They ignored him, of course. He meant no more to them than the waiter who poured their coffee. It amused Lansing to think of the pure chance that had thrown him into their path — the accident of a missed train that had led to his meeting with Hazen.

They had laid their plans well and worked their will against Hazzard with a diabolical sort of cleverness — he read that between the lines of what Hazen had told him. And now he, an utter stranger, an insignificant atom among a hundred million atoms as remote from them and their affairs as he had been yesterday, had taken a hand. Chance, of course, pure chance — but there had been no chance about his determination to get that option. There is a point in any series of events where chance must give way to an act of will. That is something that the people who attribute all the successes of life to chance — and all the failure, too — are prone to forget.

The answer to his telegram of the night came while he stood in the lobby; he caught the bell boy at the first call of his name. It was brief and to the point, and, of course, affirmative. And he became busy immediately. At the bank there was

red tape to be unwound. But he succeeded in proving that he was Robert Lansing, and it was only a little after eleven o'clock when he left the bank, carrying the equivalent of fifty thousand dollars in negotiable paper in the same envelope that contained his option. There was still time for him to draw back; he did not have to exercise his option. But the thought of withdrawing now had not occurred to him for a moment. All he wanted now was to close the deal and catch the first train for New York. He had planned that far ahead; he wanted more time for thought before he dealt with either Hazzard or his opponents.

He found Hazen, at half past eleven, twiddling his thumbs metaphorically in a Chicago lawyer's office.

"Sit down and wait — if you're still determined to make an ass of yourself," said Hazen. "Hazzard's gone back to New York — cleared out an hour ago. By Jove, I admire the old cutthroat! He came here to play his last card — lost — and wouldn't wait for the finish. Nine men out of ten would have hung around till the thing was settled. He's the tenth."

Lansing told him of the incident in the restaurant, and Hazen laughed.

"Just like him," he said. "I tell you, I'd hate to beat him. It would be too much like winning the first round in a tussle with a buzz saw. You'd get it all the worse when you came back. By the way, I've been trying to puzzle out your idea. If you think you can hold those fellows up, make them bid against one another for that stock, forget it. You'll be like the man who interferes between husband and wife when they're fighting. They'll all turn on you. They'd think nothing of joining forces, squeezing you out, and then starting a new fight among themselves after they'd got rid of you."

"I don't doubt it," said Lansing. "I saw that last night when I was wondering why no one else had tried to get the stock just to sell it to them. But that's not my idea at all. I want to sit in this game, that's all. Getting this stock is like buying a stack of chips. I'm going to stick around."

"All right — you're of age," said Hazen. He looked at his watch. "I'll close the whole thing at noon. Hazzard can't exercise his option, but it's as well to be careful about technicalities. I'm

not supposed to know he's out of it until twelve o'clock."

They fell into a thoughtful silence. Lansing was making his plans; Hazen was studying him, seeing more and more a resemblance to his father that had never struck him before. A boy, knocking at the door, interrupted their reverie.

"Mr. Cramer and Mr. Howell, to see Mr. Hazen," he said.

Lansing got up, but Hazen rose, too.

"Sit down," he said. "I'll see them outside."

He left the door ajar, and in a moment Lansing heard Howell's thin, low voice, with its caressing note.

"I suppose we can do business with you now, Hazen, in the matter of the Sears stock in Western Film," he said.

"No," said Hazen quietly. "I have every reason to suppose that the holder of an option will exercise his right."

"An option!" Howell's voice rose to a high squeak. "Jim Hazzard hasn't been able to put that over —"

"I didn't say it was Hazzard." Hazen's voice grew calm and low in pitch.

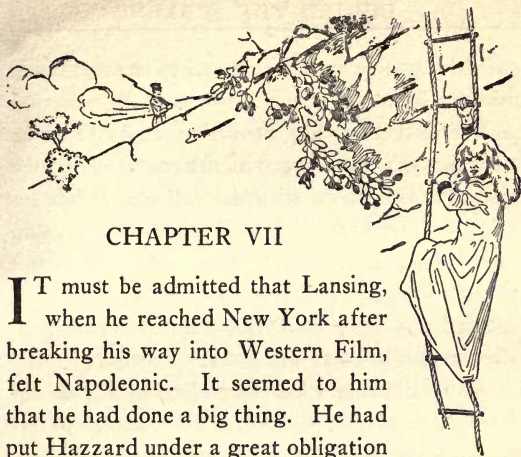
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Some one closed the door, and after that Lansing heard only exclamations, meaningless fragments of sentences. It was over very soon; Hazen, flushed and angry, rejoined him.

"Infernal crooks!" he growled. "They think I've gone in with Hazzard against them! Well—they can think so. Time's up! Have you brought the money?"

Lansing laid down his drafts. Afterward he was amused at the simplicity of the whole transaction. Within five minutes he walked out to the elevator, the owner of a small, but amazingly important, interest in Western Film. In the lobby of the building, he came upon Cramer and Howell, in the thick of a furious quarrel, that involved a vast amount of sputtering and gesticulation. Neither spared him a glance. He ran no risk of detection when he turned and smiled at them. Some of the busiest men in Chicago found the time to be amused by their violence.





CHAPTER VII

IT must be admitted that Lansing, when he reached New York after breaking his way into Western Film, felt Napoleonic. It seemed to him that he had done a big thing. He had put Hazzard under a great obligation to him, though Hazzard didn't know it yet. By virtue of his small, but important, stock holding, he could demand and obtain a voice in the affairs of the corporation. Hazzard, he was sure, would have to make him a director — probably an officer. And that would give him a chance to put some of his ideas into practice. He felt that he could revolutionize the whole moving-picture industry. Without having worked out the details, he had in his mind a sort of picture of the future, in which he was to be responsible for the product of Western Film, the pictures themselves, while Hazzard ap-

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plied his genius to financing and to the marketing of the films.

But if there is any proverb that has held its own through the changes of the centuries it is the one that has to do with the fall that is always lying in wait for pride, and the destruction that trips up a haughty spirit. Lansing's spirit wasn't exactly haughty, perhaps. But he had traveled, mentally, a long road since the mood of self-deprecation had left him.

After allowing what seemed to him a decent interval to elapse, following the transfer of his stock on the books of the Western Film, without receiving the overtures he expected from either Hazzard or Hazzard's opponents, Lansing went to see Hazzard. And his first shock came when he waited for more than an hour in the reception room of the big, ornate office on Broadway. A good many others were waiting, too; actors and actresses, all sorts of active film workers, passed in and out.

He sat within sight of Hazzard's door; the big man's roaring voice identified it for him. And his resentment, which grew and flourished in the last half hour of his detention, was by no means molli-

fied when he saw Cramer emerge, in his shirt sleeves. He had imagined a state of open war between Hazzard on the one side, and Cramer and Howell on the other. He had yet to learn of the swift adjustments of business quarrels; of the surprising readiness of such enemies to bury the hatchet — when both sides can make money, or save it, by doing so. His self-confidence was shaken ever so slightly when he was finally ushered into Hazzard's room. And it wasn't restored by the look he received from Hazzard. The big man looked at his card.

"Well, sir?" he said. "What can I do for you?"

"I — it seemed to me we ought to have a talk, Mr. Hazzard," Lansing ventured uncertainly.

"I — I suppose you know that I have acquired some stock in the Western Film Corporation?"

"Have you?" asked Hazzard. "I should say it was a good investment; I have quite a holding myself."

"And you tried to get this stock of mine," said Lansing. He was beginning to get angry. "That's why it seemed to me we ought to have a talk."

"Oh!" said Hazzard. He laughed. And then

he became suddenly the very incarnation of menace. His whole expression changed, and he leaned forward, his teeth bared. "I think I'm on to you, my friend!" he said. "Well — you can go to Cramer and Howell! You'll get nothing out of me! I don't want your stock — wouldn't take it at ten cents on the dollar! If you'd looked me up you'd have found I was a poor man to hold up!"

"My stock isn't for sale," snapped Lansing. "I bought it to keep, not to sell! If you're trying to bluff me, quit it! I know all about the way things stand here. My stock carries control, and I know it! If I vote with you, you've got a majority — if I swing to Cramer and Howell, they have. I came here to tell you I was willing to work with you — under certain conditions."

Hazzard looked surprised for a moment. Then he began to laugh, and his mirth shook him and roused the echoes of the room.

"You'd like to be the tail that wags the dog — with your little block of stock!" he said finally. "Where do you get that stuff? Take your stock home and frame it! It's dead — it's out of the way — see? You've run up against business men,

son, and I guess we'll get along without your help. You took that stock out of the market when you bought it. You don't cut any more ice than any one else who might happen to buy up a few stray shares. You don't want to believe every story you see in the papers — especially in the moving-picture trade papers. They've started a fight in Western Film about every six weeks since we organized the company, but you'll notice that business is still being done at the old stand."

"All right!" said Lansing. "You don't have to talk business if you don't want to. But I'm not depending on anything I've seen in the papers. I *know* how you'd stand now if Cramer and Howell had got hold of the stock I bought. I know what the people who've got stock control can do to a corporation without going to jail. I came here to make a friendly arrangement with you — and if you haven't got any more sense than to try bluffing me I'll wait till you come to your senses."

Again it must be admitted that Lansing felt a due sense of his own importance. His anger had banished the chastened mood that had been induced by Hazzard's reception of him. One reason for this was that he simply couldn't believe that

Hazzard had made up his quarrel with Cramer and Howell. He stalked out, with the echo of Hazzard's great laughter in his ears. But he had sense enough not to take his anger and his stock to the other side. He had a wholesome fear of Cramer and Howell; he felt that they were too adept in the tricks of high finance to make them safe associates.

Hazzard's treatment of him had dealt a severe blow to Lansing's pride. But his confidence in the strength of his own position was not severely shaken.

"He's so used to dealing with four-flushers and the cheap Broadway crowd that's hanging on to the movie business that he puts every one else in their class," he decided.

And so he wrote to Hazzard, generously overlooking the treatment he had received, and explained his ideas more fully than he had been able to do in their one-sided conversation. Hazzard's answer was prompt — and brief. He wrote that directors were elected at the annual meeting of the stockholders, of which notice would, in due course, be mailed to Lansing, at the address credited to him on the company's books. Meanwhile, any

proper questions that Lansing, as a stockholder, might choose to ask would be answered by the proper officer.

And before Lansing had absorbed the full effect of that letter he received another, signed by Howell, as secretary of Western Film — a brief communication, informing him that the directors had decided to pass the semi-annual dividend. Increased expenses, the necessity for establishing a reserve fund, and a decision to spend a good deal of money for the construction of new studios were advanced as the reasons for this action.

No mention was made, however, of another reason that supplied Broadway with gossip. At least one trade paper said, without actually mentioning names, that that same meeting of the Western Film directors had voted increases of salary to Hazzard, Cramer, and Howell that more than made up to them for the passed dividend. This rumor proved as easy to confirm, to all practical intents and purposes, as it was hard to prove. Hazen, moreover, assured Lansing that the directors were strictly within their legal rights. And he proved his title to Lansing's friendship by refraining from any reminder of

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the warning he had given him, in Chicago, against the purchase of Western Film stock.

Lansing, in spite of his mistaken notion concerning his power, was no fool. He had the quality of facing facts without blinking. And when he took stock of the situation he saw it exactly as it was. Hazzard had chosen to enter into an alliance, more or less permanent, with Cramer and Howell, for the purpose of freezing him out. The next step might easily be a receivership, a reorganization, undertaken simply to make it impossible for him to hold his stock. He had very little pride or self-satisfaction left when he reached that conclusion.

But he still had his uncompromising jaw. And there was a fighting gleam in his eyes. Perhaps he was going to lose the fifty thousand dollars he had put into his purchase of a hand in the big game. But it would be after a fight — and he was prepared, if it should be necessary, to throw what money he had left after his first investment.



CHAPTER VIII

LANSING didn't avail himself of Hazzard's kind invitation to ask questions. Or, at least, he didn't ask them of the officials of Western Film. He obtained an election, instead, to the Screen Club, then beginning to become influential and important in the moving-picture world. Here he met men who were in touch with moving pictures on all sides. Actors, directors, publicity men, officials of various companies, all met on common ground in the club. And, most important of all for Lansing's purpose, it was the chief haunt of keen-eyed young men who represented the trade papers of the movies.

These men were omniscient. They knew everything about every company in the industry. For their papers they gathered news and advertising. For themselves they gathered information, recognizing that as the greatest asset they could have. Much of it they kept to themselves. Very little of the best news they obtained ever got into print. But, properly approached, they would emit bits of

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gossip, of scandal, that threw a vivid and highly interesting light upon what was going on behind the screen, so to speak.

One thing impressed Lansing mightily. It was an attitude that seemed to be shared by almost every one he met in the club, an attitude of profound contempt for the public.

"They'll stand for anything!" said Debrett, who, at thirty, was dean of the trade press. "There's no such thing as the moving-picture business. It's not a business — it's a charity. The people have got to have their pictures — that's all. They're mad about the films. There never was such a business. The fanniest baseball fan that ever was isn't in it with a movie fan.

"The public takes any kind of a raw deal the manufacturers hand it and comes back crying for more. They stand for fake posters. They don't care how raw a fake is."

"That won't last," said Lansing. "And I believe there's more money in giving the public a square deal, even the way things are now, than in faking."

"There isn't — you're wrong, and that's the answer," said Debrett. "Some of the old com-

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panies are on the level now, and they're not making half the money the fakers are. It's just like the royalty game; on the patents. The licensed companies are paying big money to the holders of the original patents. Some of 'em started doing it without even being sued, like the Kalem outfit. And a gang of independents come along and don't pay. No one stops 'em. There's just so much velvet for them."

"It sounds well," said Lansing stubbornly. "But, just the same, I believe the big money's still to be made in this game. And I think the man who finds out what the public really wants, and supplies it, is going to make it, too. This movie industry's still in its wildcat days. It's booming. But there's a big smash coming if the boomers don't look out."

Debrett grinned. The story of Lansing's investment in Western Film was an open secret along Broadway by this time. And Debrett thought, of course, that Lansing was calling the grapes he hadn't been able to reach sour. Debrett, in his cynicism, simply reflected the atmosphere in which he lived and had his being. Not, of course, that there weren't honest, sincere men engaged in

the manufacture and distribution and exploitation of films. Debrett himself had admitted that there were. But at this time, if these were not actually in the minority, they were obscured by the others, who were getting the big money. The plodders got as little attention, as little publicity, as does a conservative, old-fashioned bank, for instance, during the meteoric rise of mushroom institutions in a period of expansion. Lansing thought of that comparison. And he remembered that when the last panic had come it was the old-line banks that had saved the day, while the spectacular growths of boom times had collapsed. He didn't take Debrett very seriously. But he absorbed what the writer could tell him.

And it was a hint from Debrett that ended his inactivity at last, after weeks in which he had chafed at his inability to find a means of getting at the imperturbable Hazzard.

"Something doing," Debrett told him one day. "The patents' people are getting ready to start something."

"What? It's pretty late in the day for infringement suits, isn't it? And I thought that was all pretty well settled, anyhow."

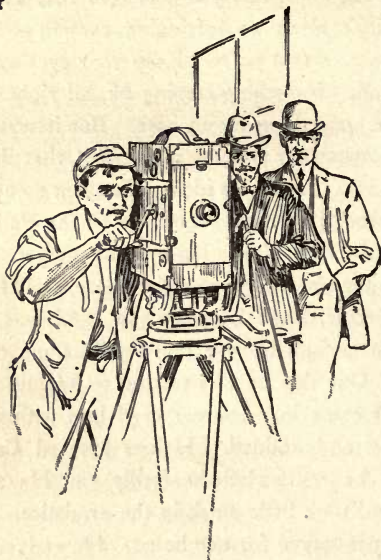
Debrett winked at him.

"So it is — theoretically," he said. "If you believe all you hear, you'll believe that Western Film isn't using an infringing camera — hasn't used one for two years. Keep your eyes open — that's all. Something coming off, all right."

That gave Lansing an idea. But it was luck, chance, whatever you please to call it, that showed him the way to use his idea. He spent some time every week in the studio on top of the Palisades that had seen his initiation into the movies. As a stockholder, he had some rights there, and Haines, the director, liked him, anyhow, and was independent enough to give him the freedom of the place. One day he was talking to Haines when Cramer came in. Cramer eyed him with veiled hostility and nodded. Haines greeted Cramer curtly; he was whole-heartedly on Hazzard's side, and took little stock in the armistice.

Cramer stayed for two hours. He arrived during the interval Haines allowed for luncheon, and when that was over, watched the making of a few scenes. At intervals he asked questions. How much did such an actor get? What was the wastage of film? Couldn't it be reduced?

Was it necessary to keep the great batteries of lights in action so constantly? Wasn't a lot of time wasted in rehearsing a scene five or six times?



He had a perfect right to ask these questions. Lansing knew that, and knew, too, that he shouldn't be surprised at seeing Cramer here. But he was. He couldn't help wondering how

soon Cramer would reveal the secret purpose that had brought him over. He had formed his estimate of Cramer long since. And it was that the man was constitutionally crooked; that he would rather take the devious, twisted path any time than the obvious, straight, short cut; that he wasn't capable of being loyal. And now, in Cramer's manner, there was something furtive. While he was engaged in the most innocent action he would look over his shoulder, as if he expected to be spied upon. Lansing had an intense conviction that Cramer was asking all his questions, making all his examinations of trivial things, so that those who saw him wouldn't know, after he had gone, what it was that he had really come to find out.

So Lansing started when, after Cramer had gone over the whole studio, he came to rest finally beside Steve Carter, the camera man, and started asking questions. Lansing unobtrusively edged over toward them, catching Carter's disgusted grin on the way.

"Chap around the other day said he had a new camera," said Cramer. "Couldn't talk to him — didn't want to admit how little I knew about the

thing. How does it work — eh? Show me how the wheels go round.”

Carter winked at Lansing; then launched into an involved and technical explanation. Cramer, in spite of his confessed ignorance, asked no questions now. He listened intently, and seemed to understand the explanation, and to find it perfectly clear — though Lansing knew that, without some fore-knowledge of the subject, he couldn't have done that. The explanation lasted while a set was being made; at the sharp call of “Camera!” from Haines, when that work was done, Cramer melted away unobtrusively.

To Lansing, who chose to follow him, and to cross the river with him, it seemed not without significance that Cramer, once he reached New York, went, as fast and as straight as a taxicab could take him, not to the Western offices, but to those of a firm of lawyers who represented the licensed interests. He didn't get out of his own taxi when Cramer alighted; instead, he told his driver to drive him through the park, unmindful of the extravagance of the proceeding. He wanted to think.

And the products of his thinking sent him to

Hazzard that night. He had no proof worthy of the name. But he had what is likely, in the right hands, to be just as useful, a deep-seated conviction that his suspicions were well founded. And his suspicions went back to the old fixed idea that had taken him to Hazzard in the beginning. He was as little able to believe now as he had been then that Cramer and Howell were prepared to abandon their fight for the control of Western Film. And it was certain that, if he were right, they had a weapon now that promised to be as effective as the one he had snatched from their hands in Chicago. His argument was a process of elimination, but it was one that looked plausible to him.

He had seen Hazzard many times since his formal call upon him; on a few of the rare occasions when Hazzard showed himself in the Screen Club rooms, very often in restaurants, where a great deal of the really important business of the movie world was conducted. Hazzard always recognized him; seemed to make it a point, indeed, to greet him with a contemptuous, amused tolerance. Lansing had writhed once or twice under those greetings, when Hazzard had nodded

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to him, and then turned, with his great laugh, to his companions, evidently pointing him out.

So he knew where to find Hazzard, once he had made up his mind to go to him. The third restaurant he dropped into proved to be the right one; Hazzard was there, with three or four men Lansing knew by sight. He gave Lansing the usual greeting — and looked curious, even interested, when Lansing, instead of looking quickly away, smiled back at him. Two or three times more in the next few minutes he stole a look at Lansing, who, by attention, was able to meet his eyes, so that Hazzard, with what would have been confusion in any ordinary man, shifted his gaze.

Hazzard's companions dropped off one by one. Others took their places. It was Hazzard's way to hold a sort of court. All sorts of propositions were made to him at these night sessions. He liked this, and encouraged the practice. It catered to a curious sort of vanity, and there was a practical reason, too. He could always plead that necessary data were in his office; that he must have time to consult them. In this new, curious business, so like a growing child, many men appeared with suggestions on which they demanded

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instant action. Hazzard was often glad of a good excuse to put them off and still keep them at his disposal. And so, though he was extremely hard to reach in his office, at night he was accessible to anyone who chose to walk up to his table and introduce himself.

It was nearly midnight when Lansing observed signs of a breaking up of Hazzard's table. At once he paid his check; he was on his way to the door when Hazzard, roaring for his waiter, signed his own collection of checks, and rose. Lansing stopped to buy a cigar; he reached the sidewalk a step ahead of the big man.

"Buying automobiles with your Western Film dividends?"

Hazzard's great voice boomed in his ear. Lansing turned around.

"Oh, hello — going home so early?" he said. "Well, I should think you need some sleep."

"Huh? What?" said Hazzard. "What d'ye mean, young fellow?"

"Oh — nothing," said Lansing. "But you've got some busy days ahead of you, I guess."

"Busy days? What's eating you now? All my days are busy."

Lansing walked on, quickening his pace a little. Purposely he turned into a side street, though he knew that Hazzard's path lay straight up Broadway. Hazzard, as he had expected, followed and overtook him.

"Well, I hope you win out — that's all," said Lansing finally. "I guess my Western stock's worth something now, even if it isn't paying dividends. But if this infringement suit gets going right and they tie you up with an injunction — well, it wouldn't be worth the frame you advised me to buy for it."

Hazzard's hand fell on his shoulder and spun him around under a street light. Hazzard glared at him. But when he spoke his voice was soft, gentle, almost a purr.

"*What's* that?" he asked. "What d'ye mean — infringement suit?"

"You must know as much about it as I do," said Lansing. "After all you know, you can't expect to keep on using a camera that's a rank infringement of the basic patents forever. You're bound to be called sooner or later."

"You've been hitting a pipe," said Hazzard. "Our camera's not an infringement. I'll bet you

can't name a single thing that even looks like an infringement."

"I think I can," said Lansing modestly. He tried to keep his excitement out of his voice. For this was the crucial moment. He had to bluff now, and the success of his whole plan depended upon his ability to handle Hazzard — a man who was reputed to understand more of the art of poker, as it is played, with and without cards, than any man in New York.

He had refreshed his memory before beginning his search for Hazzard. And now, in answer to Hazzard's taunt, he described from memory, not the camera used in Western studios, but the original, licensed camera. As he did it, Hazzard's jaw dropped. Then suddenly he swore.

"No one was supposed to know that," he said furiously. "I'll break someone for letting it out —"

"You can't blame anyone for telling Cramer about it. He's entitled to ask as many questions as he likes, I suppose. You even said I was —"

"Cramer!" said Hazzard. And at his tone, Lansing knew he had won his fight, knew that his bluff was not going to be called.

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"Yes — Cramer. He got his information this afternoon. And it may interest you to know that he stopped at Gaskell & Flood's offices after he came back from Fort Lee."

"Cramer!" said Hazzard again. "I might have known they wouldn't play fair."

And at that, seeing the iron hot, Lansing struck quickly.

"My offer still stands," he said. "I'll vote my stock with you in any action you take against Cramer and Howell. And, for an emergency measure, I'll do it without conditions. We can settle those later."

Hazzard hesitated a moment. In it he stared hard at Lansing.

"I believe you're on the level," he said slowly, and with infinite surprise. "And — by George, I know you've got some common sense! You've backed the right horse if you want to make your stock worth something. All right, my son — I guess you've tipped me off in time to give me a chance to start something. Meet me at the Fort Lee studio tomorrow, eight-thirty. No — be at the office at eight, and I'll run you over in my car."

"Right!" said Lansing. "Good night."

CHAPTER IX

HAZZARD, when Lansing met him in the morning, was in a silent mood. There was a very brief delay at the big office building; it served for the sending of numerous telegrams.

"Taking no chances," Hazzard explained curtly. "I've stopped work in California — everywhere except Fort Lee. Not that I think they're ready to attack all along the line, but they might be. Here — take this."

Lansing, with some curiosity, read the paper Hazzard handed him. It was a formal notice of a special meeting of the stockholders of Western Film, signed by Hazzard as president.

"Cramer and Howell get 'em, too," said Hazzard. "And the people who hold one share of stock to qualify them. All right — we're off."

Hazzard drove himself, and they crossed the long Weehawken ferry in a high-powered, low-bodied runabout. As they sat, well up in the bow of the boat, Lansing looked northward and saw, through the haze that hung over the river, the

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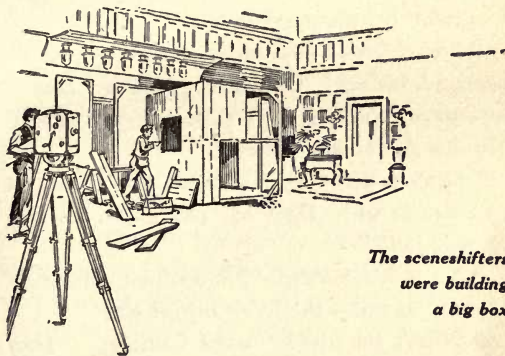
slow progress of one of the uptown boats. Hazzard chafed at the slow pace of the ferryboat; but, once they were landed, he made amends for that. His car swung up the hill very fast, and, once they were on the level road that crowned the Palisades, he took all the chances possible with the speed limit.

The studio, when they reached it, presented the aspect of a fortified camp. A good deal of land went with it, and since yesterday, Lansing saw, barbed wire had been stretched about. Quick work! He had to admire the way Hazzard moved when he once started. A man stood by the only opening in the wire barrier, and he refused to let them pass until Haines appeared. Lansing chafed, but Hazzard chuckled.

"The man's right," he said. "It's what I'm paying him for. If he keeps me out he won't let other people in, I guess."

None of the actors had appeared yet; the studio was occupied only by what might be considered now a permanent garrison. Haines, Steve Carter, the camera man; Dunning, who looked after the properties and might have qualified as purchasing agent for a railway as a result of his

experience; Roddy Thompson, the expert who manipulated the lights, and three broad-shouldered sceneshifters were on the job. And they were all busy. Dunning, who as props, had to be a jack of all trades, was temporarily a chief carpenter. Under his directions, and with the assistance of



*The sceneshifters
were building
a big box*

his skillful hands, the sceneshifters were building a big box — a sort of cross between the crate in which a piano is shipped and a sentry box.

Lansing felt like an outsider. Hazzard drew Haines aside, and, chuckling, they watched the swift growth of the box. It had a door on one side, but no bottom. And opposite the door a

square piece was cut out, hinged and put back, like a window. When it was finished, Dunning looked at it approvingly, then proceeded to cover it with black cloth. Its use was revealed a minute later, when the all-important camera was set up and covered with the box. Through the open window the lens had free play; behind the camera there was room for the operator.

"Right!" said Hazzard. "Now — you understand, Haines? Only three people are authorized to enter that box. You, Carter, and myself. No one else on any pretext."

"Suppose they ring in a sheriff, with some sort of court order? Does our pay go on just the same in jail?"

"No — it's doubled. But don't let anyone get at that camera — sheriff or anyone else!"

"What's the idea?" asked Lansing. "They must have the facts."

"Maybe Cramer has," said Hazzard. "But they've got to have more proof. And I doubt if Cramer's got the nerve to get up in court and testify against what seem to be his own interests, anyhow. Bluffed me last night, didn't you?"

"Eh?" said Lansing, startled.

"I don't mind — it was the right thing. But I've been thinking over your description of our camera. You got the basic things right, but it was the licensed camera you described in detail. Now you'd better tell me exactly what you did know. I'm for you now — anyone who can bluff me overnight I'm going to have on my side."

Lansing laughed, and told him the whole story truthfully. From time to time Hazzard nodded.

"All right," he said briefly. "I sized you up wrong. Well — if you were looking for trouble, son, you landed right where old man Trouble lives. I think we've got 'em stopped for the time. Unless they can see this camera, get absolutely unshakable expert witnesses to give technical evidence of an infringement, they can't do much. They can't get an injunction on hearsay."

"Can't you work without an infringing camera?"

"Can't be done. Their patents, if they stand, sew up the whole game, give 'em a monopoly. I don't believe they'll stand. I think they've claimed too much — like Selden. By the time the thing gets up to the supreme court we'll have them licked. But — it's no time to be tied up with that

sort of litigation. They've got the bulge right now, if we get into court. They've got the money. We haven't — not where we can get at it. We've had to put all we had and all we made back into the business. They're past that stage, and they've got the banking connections, too, that we haven't made yet. We're running on a cash basis. Ever stop to figure our pay roll, our bills for film, for printing, for expressage? Cash — every cent! We can show a balance every Saturday night, with all bills paid for that week."

"Hold on!" said Lansing suddenly. "You know the facts about this camera, don't you? What's to prevent their bringing an infringement suit, nailing you as a witness, and holding you for contempt if you refuse to answer?"

"Nothing — if they get me," said Hazzard. "That's why I'm not coming back here for a while."

"I think I'll stick around," said Lansing. "Looks to me as if there might be some fun."

"I expect to keep you busy," said Hazzard grimly. "I'm going back to the office now. You stay here — and then come over on the ferry. I don't want you to be seen with me just yet. When

you come to the office ask for Brewer. You'll be taken from his office to mine. Understand?"

"Right!" Lansing nodded; a minute later, Hazzard's automobile was vanishing in a cloud of dust. And within half an hour the studio, save for the shrouded camera, had assumed its normal busy aspect. Actors and actresses, surprised by the barbed wire, the mysterious box, were rather pleased, too. Those of them who were afflicted with artistic temperaments enjoyed the mystery. And Lansing was a little startled when a girl spoke to him, hailing him cordially by name. Then he remembered her. She was Mary Brewster, the extra girl of his first day, who had so impressed him. Since then she had impressed others, too; she was playing a part now. Haines saw him watching her as she worked before the camera.

"There's a girl with a future," he said. "If she gets over being so fresh. You can't tell her anything. At least — you can tell her, and she listens, and does just what you say in rehearsal. And then, with the camera turning, she does just as she darn pleases and says she forgot or thought it would look better."

"Well — does it?" asked Lansing, grinning.

"Most of the time — yes," admitted Haines. "But that's not the point. She's supposed to do as she's told."

"She never will," said Lansing. He looked at her thoughtfully. "The trouble with her, Haines, is that she's meant to be a star. Boost that girl — advertise her everywhere — and she'll be to the films what Ethel Barrymore or Maude Adams is to the legitimate."

"Tell it to Sweeney!" scoffed Haines. "And for the love of Mike don't let her hear you. Her head's big enough now. That's the trouble, anyhow. A lot of these people are getting so they think they're the whole thing. Salaries are going up. It's all wrong. The public don't care who's in a film. The Biograph people have the right idea. They don't let the public know who their actors are. Keeps their people from getting a swelled head."

"You'll wake up some time," said Lansing. "I'll bet you that it won't be long before you see movie stars being featured just like Bernhardt and Forbes-Robertson. Go on with your slave driving. I'm off to Manhattan."

At the entrance he found the sentinel firmly

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barring the entrance of two men who couldn't account for themselves. One, immaculate, keen-eyed, stood aside, smiling faintly. The other, a shabby, furtive man, was doing the arguing. Lansing, with a sudden stirring of the latent detective instinct in him, looked at his watch. A car was due in five minutes. The last one had arrived twenty-five minutes before. How had these men come — since it was to be presumed that they had only just arrived? Halfway down the hill he stopped. He looked down the road that led toward Fort Lee and Weehawken. Perhaps a hundred yards away an automobile was standing. He made his way over a stone wall, took cover in an apple orchard, and got within sight of the car. In the tonneau, smoking a cigar, was Cramer. That settled any lingering doubts Lansing might have had.

He didn't go up and accuse Cramer. Instead, chuckling, he went back, caught the trolley with a swift dash, and made his leisurely way back to the city. He had no fears as to what might have happened at the studio. Carter and Haines, he knew, would smash the camera before they would let any unauthorized person see it.

Getting into Hazzard's office proved slightly difficult and highly amusing. Cramer, of course, wasn't in the offices, but the situation was complicated by the continued presence of Howell. Howell's door was open, as Lansing saw when he was conducted into the room of Brewer, Hazzard's secretary and confidential man. And Howell, in his shirt sleeves, peered at him.

"Nice mess!" said Brewer disgustedly. "The boss is afraid to curse Howell out, even — it'd be just like that sneak to have a subpoena ready to hand out! Still, there's one or two things about this floor and this whole building that Howell don't know yet."

Lansing discovered the truth of this. In Brewer's office was a great safe. It looked as if only a wrecking crew could move it. But Brewer lifted a rug and disclosed a little arrangement of rails; on these, so delicately was it balanced, the great safe moved at a touch. Moving, it disclosed a door, which, on being opened, led into Hazzard's room. Once it had closed behind him, Lansing couldn't see the door at all.

"Did you have this doped out when you moved in here?" Lansing asked in astonishment.

"Bet your life!" said Hazzard. "Say — they talk about the way Jay Gould and Jim Fisk used to dodge process servers. I bet I've got them skinned a mile. I've known a good many times when getting away from a subpoena was all that kept me out of the bankruptcy court. Sit down."

Hazzard had spread certain papers out on his desk.

"I've got to disappear," he said. "I guess you know it, so I don't mind admitting that this is the tightest corner they've had me backed into yet. I've got them licked at that — but I've got to have the time to do it. So I'm taking to the tall timber today — right now. You and Brewer have got to swing things between you while I'm gone. Brewer'll vote my stock at this meeting that's been called — he's got my proxy. Here's everything that's to be done. Read those notes and see if you get it."

As he obeyed, Lansing whistled. And he put the papers down with a nod that expressed admiration and surprise together.

"Fighting fire with fire," said Hazzard. "I know what you're going to say, but these people haven't got clean hands to go into court with."

They'll stand the gaff because they can't do anything else. All right?"

"All right," said Lansing. "I'm game."

There was nothing dignified about the manner in which Hazzard disappeared. Brewer went before him to clear the path, which led to the roof. And Lansing, looking for excitement, went along. They took Tim Riley, the gray-coated special officer of the building, along. And Riley, thoroughly enjoying his part, arrested a slinking youth in ill-fitting clothes for loitering on the roof. The coast proved to be clear on the next roof and the next. But Lansing, scrambling from one to the other, had to smile at the thought of how Hazzard would look, following in their footsteps.

He wasn't privileged to see that. For, while Hazzard was making his get-away, he and Brewer staged a little comedy downstairs. They went openly into Hazzard's room first, with Howell's eyes following them. When they emerged, Brewer carried a suit case. Lansing hung back long enough to see Howell go to his window. Then he joined Brewer; from the lobby they carried the bag to Hazzard's conspicuous and well-known roadster. At a word from Brewer, the

chauffeur started the engine, and the secretary and Lansing looked back anxiously at the revolving doors of the building. Tim Riley, who had disposed of his captive in an empty room, appeared suddenly, shooing all loiterers from the lobby.

A seedy man got between Brewer and the car. And, at just about that moment, Lansing, looking up the street, saw a taxicab start uptown. From its rear window a handkerchief was waved.

"All right, Dick," he said to the chauffeur. "Off with you — you know where to go."

The car started. The seedy man exclaimed as it sent him spinning; two other men, who had seemed to know the seedy one, sprang into a taxicab and gave chase. Riley, Lansing, and Brewer, grinning broadly, went back upstairs. Brewer tried Hazzard's door and found it locked. At his elbow Howell appeared.

"I want this nonsense stopped, Mr. Brewer," he said in his high, squeaky voice. "I demand that Mr. Hazzard see me at once."

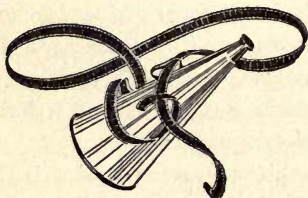
"Mr. Hazzard isn't in, sir," said Brewer respectfully. "I think — er — that is, I believe he has gone out of town."

“Don’t lie to me!” said Howell. “I’ve been watching his door, and he hasn’t gone out.”

Silently Brewer unlocked and opened the door.

“See for yourself, sir,” he said.

The room, of course, was empty. And even Lansing and Brewer didn’t know where Hazzard had gone. It is possible, however, that Brewer, had he been willing to do so, might have made a good guess. He had had time to become familiar with Hazzard’s methods.



CHAPTER X

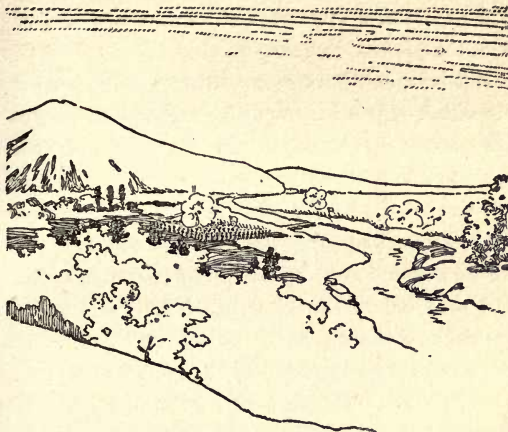
THE first two or three days after Hazzard's flight dragged for Lansing. There had been the little interlude of excitement; he had the tremendous satisfaction of knowing he had set in motion wheels that were really too big for him to push. His old admiration for Hazzard had been sharply reawakened. But, when he stopped to think, he saw that he hadn't, after all, accomplished very much for himself. It was true that he would be "in" Western Film hereafter, if Hazzard beat Howell and Cramer and their allies. But he would be in on sufferance; because Hazzard was grateful to him, or had decided that he would make a good cat's-paw. At best he would play tail to Hazzard's kite, and he saw, all at once, that that wasn't at all what he wanted. He might conceivably make a great deal of money as a satellite of Hazzard — might be written about at some future time as the millionaires of Pittsburgh who were made by Carnegie are written about now in the Sunday newspapers.

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But Lansing didn't want to play second fiddle to any man. He went back to his original impulses, and found that he wasn't in the way of obeying them. He regretted nothing. Everything that had happened since the day he had first crossed the Fort Lee ferry had added to his experience. And now, all at once, in the time he had for reflection while he waited for Hazzard to strike, all that experience crystalizing, came, so to speak, to a head. A good many men are like Lansing. They go along, listening, observing, and scarcely knowing themselves that they are doing so. Then, all at once, they find themselves with complete conception of whatever it is they have been studying. There is no other

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way of accounting for the sudden rise of certain baseball players, who, from seemingly hopeless mediocrity, become stars between October and April.

So, all at once, Lansing saw two things. He saw what was wrong, what was rotten, in the great movie industry. He saw that it was headed, surely and perhaps swiftly, toward disaster. And he saw, just as clearly, what had to be done — what one man, at least, could do. He saw how he,

Robert Lansing, could launch a new enterprise and be, despite the start the earlier men had of him, the pioneer in a virgin field.

But he didn't have money enough to go ahead. He didn't regret his impulsive action in Chicago. He guessed that he might never have seen his real opportunity without the experiences of the last few weeks. So he had sense enough not to repine. And he faced squarely the fact that for the present he was and must be the tail of Hazzard's kite, and that unless the kite rose he himself never could leave the ground. The great thing, after all, was that he intended to change all that; that he wasn't a bit deceived, as a good many men in his position might have been, by the chance that lay in sticking by Hazzard after the urgent necessity for doing so had ended.

"These people and their fights!" he said to himself rather scornfully. "They fight among themselves as if the result would really settle anything — and they forget all about the public, that can smash 'em all — and will, if they don't give it what it wants. It doesn't know what movies can be yet — the public. But someone is going to show it sooner or later."

The idea, of course, was that that someone was to be Robert Lansing. But that was an idea he preferred, for the time, to keep strictly to himself.

And meanwhile the time came for the special meeting of the stockholders of Western Film. Howell took the chair in Hazzard's absence, and Cramer at once moved to adjourn. But Brewer presented Hazzard's proxy, and he, Lansing, and the dummies who had been endowed with a share apiece of Hazzard's stock voted that motion down. Then consulting, from time to time, slips of paper Hazzard had given them, Lansing and Brewer proceeded to declare vacant the offices of vice president and secretary, held by Howell and Cramer, and also their directorships. Cramer and Howell protested, but without spirit.

"You can do this, of course," said Howell darkly. "But it won't do you any good. And I can tell you, if you know where to reach Hazzard, you'd better get hold of him mighty quick and tell him to come back."

But, though it looked as if the game were in their hands, he and Cramer both looked worried. And after the meeting they sought Lansing out separately, and made veiled suggestions that he

ought, in his own interests, to detach himself from Hazzard. He was polite, but otherwise unsatisfactory. He wasn't associated with Hazzard, he explained. On questions that had come before the meeting, he added, he had voted according to his own judgment, which might be mistaken, but wasn't to be changed.

On the fourth day of Hazzard's absence the opposition seemed to decide that no more time was to be lost. Without waiting for his appearance, counsel for the licensed interests began their infringement suit. But Hazen, to whom Lansing took the papers, laughed.

"They can't get even a temporary injunction if that's all the evidence they've got," he said. "And I suppose Hazzard has buried everyone who's really qualified to describe that camera?"

"I guess he has," said Lansing.

So far things did not look so bad. But — Hazzard couldn't stay away indefinitely. He would have to come back. And, sooner or later, too, the opposition could get the facts it needed. Hazen agreed with him that if that happened the situation would be critical — and worse than critical. Even if Hazzard was right, and the

patents in question were held to be too comprehensive to cover fundamental things that should never have been included in any patent, there was bound to be serious trouble if it came to an injunction.

And, as it turned out, Hazzard hadn't been able to stop every leak. Within a week a temporary injunction was granted on evidence that was secured, not at Fort Lee, but in Florida. And on that day, Lansing, worried more seriously than he was willing to admit, even to himself, got a wire from Hazzard. It had been filed in Buffalo; it asked him to meet Hazzard's train, a famous flyer from Chicago, on its arrival. Lansing obeyed; thought of an improvement, even. Instead of waiting in New York, he went up the line to the place where steam power gives way to the electric current, and found Hazzard dozing in his compartment.

"Good boy!" said Hazzard at sight of him. "Shoot now! Tell me everything that's happened. I've had code telegrams from Brewer, but he didn't put much in — wasn't sure I'd get them probably."

Lansing obeyed.

"All right," said Hazzard. "I guess they're a little worried. Mamma! Wait till I'm through with them."

He smoked silently, thoughtfully, until they were in the tunnel.

"Used to be one of these afternoon-tea sports, didn't you?" he flung at Lansing suddenly. "Hardest work you did was spending pop's money or playing a game of tennis now and then maybe?"

"Something like that," admitted Lansing cheerfully.

"One of the Four Hundred, eh?"

"There's no such animal — but yes, to what you mean — not what you said."

"H'm! Lot of rich friends? Millionaires? Fellows with so much money they don't know how to spend it? Steam yachts — pictures in the paper — breach-of-promise suits — lots of publicity about their kale?"

Lansing laughed at the picture. A few months before he would have resented it bitterly. But his viewpoint had changed since he had joined the ranks of the workers.

"Any intimate friends like that?" Hazzard

persisted. "Any you know well enough to slap on the shoulder and call by their first names?"

"Some, I guess."

"Well — anyone in particular? One who's got all sorts of money — and everyone knows he's got it? In a class with the Astors and the Vanderbilts for big money?"

The shining, cheerful face of Sandy Brangwyn rose before Lansing's eyes. It brought a new smile. But then he frowned suddenly, fiercely.

"Yes," he said, "I've got a pal like that — I guess he'd qualify on all your counts."

"And you know him the way I said? So he'd do anything you asked?"

"Yes," he said gravely. "But — he won't be asked, Hazzard. I'm ready to back your play any way I can myself, but I can't borrow from my friends —"

"Don't want his money," said Hazzard. "Who said anything about borrowing money? I want to borrow him. You go get him, see? Bring him to my office. Just walk in with him, and tell him to nod to me real friendly."

"If you'd explain —" suggested Lansing.

"No time. And I don't like explanations, any-

how. Bad thing to talk about your plans, Lansing. Liable to start a jinx working to get you. I want this friend of yours to act as if he stood for me — with me — see? He don't need to say anything. Just call him by name. If he looks like a saphead, so much the better."

The grinding of the brakes as the train pulled into the station cut off further explanations. And, absurd as the whole thing seemed, Lansing knew he would do what Hazzard asked. He had shaken off the spell of Hazzard's personality to some extent in his days of clear thinking and planning while the big man was away. But that personality reasserted itself as soon as he was in direct contact with it again. He remembered Sandy Brangwyn's daily schedule pretty well — having lived his own life, for some years, on very much the same sort of schedule. In the middle of the afternoon he could count on finding Brangwyn at a certain club, if he were in town at all. A cab carried him to the club, and Brangwyn greeted him like a man returned from the dead.

"I want you," said Lansing. "Need some help, Sandy —"

"How much?" asked Sandy, reaching for a

check book; and not offensively, either. He was that sort.

"Nothing like that, Sandy. Worse. I want you to come along with me. Sort of game. Bit like charades, I guess. Game?"

"I'll try anything once," said Sandy. He liked the phrases of the moment. He always had a choice stock of them. And, though he usually adopted the one of most recent invention even before it got into the comic sections of the newspapers, he clung to such sayings long after everyone else had given them up. There was a certain method in this. He very seldom had to invent a complete sentence when he talked.

"I don't know where I'm going, but I'm on my way," he said as Lansing hailed a passing taxi.

"You're going into the movies," said Lansing. "We're on our way to Jim Hazzard's office. Your play is to be friendly with him. Act as if he were an old pal."

This, of course, would be easy for Brangwyn. He was friendly with everyone. And he entered the offices of Western Film with a broad grin, which grew expansive at the sight of a pretty Western actress who was waiting for the elevator.

"Sly dog, Bobbie!" he said. "So this is where you've been hiding your light! Ah, there, Bobbie!"

He fairly beamed when Lansing stopped to speak to Brewer, on guard at Hazzard's door.

"Go right in," said the imperturbable Brewer. "Howell's in there — and Raeburn."

"Raeburn!" said Lansing, with something like a gasp. For Raeburn, beyond all question, was the power behind Howell and Cramer, the bitterest, the most powerful, the most ruthless, of Hazzard's enemies.

"And some lawyers," added Brewer, smiling very faintly. "But go on in — Mr. Hazzard's expecting you."

Only Lansing noticed Hazzard's quick look at Brangwyn, and the relief that came into his eyes. Sandy played up beautifully; he nodded carelessly to Hazzard, and shook hands. And he continued to beam. His expression indicated that he would nod to all the men present and shake hands with them too, if he knew them, and would be delighted to do it, just because he found them in the office of a man he liked as much as he did Hazzard.

"I brought Brangwyn along," said Lansing. "But if you're not ready —"

"Sit down — won't be a minute," said Hazzard expansively. "Too bad to take Mr. Brangwyn's time up this way — but business is business!"

Lansing wanted to get a chance to study the men in the room. Their expressions made the task worth while. Raeburn had started when he saw Sandy; Lansing hadn't overestimated the fame — some called it notoriety — that Sandy had acquired. He and his millions were known to the company beyond doubt. And now Lansing began to understand what sort of game it was that Hazzard was playing. Sandy, with his millions, didn't have to propitiate this interest and that to keep them. His money came from Manhattan real estate, bought by his ancestors when an acre cost as much as a square foot does now, and he could lay his hands on as much cash as some fairly big banks at a week's notice.

"Now!" Hazzard's voice rose to his familiar roar as he turned to Raeburn. "You can see the options I've got. Is that infringement suit going through — or will it be withdrawn tomorrow?"

Raeburn hesitated; seemed to be on the verge of apoplexy.

"I want to talk to you alone for five minutes," he said at last.

"Make it short," said Sandy, as Hazzard rose and led the way to the door. "We've got to talk, too, you know."

Hazzard smiled. They could hear his roaring voice from time to time; Lansing guessed he was using Howell's old room. And in less than five minutes they were back. Raeburn stopped at the door.

"Come on!" he said to his crew. "We've settled it."

"He's right," said Hazzard to Lansing and Sandy. He began to laugh, and before he stopped there were tears in his eyes.

"They thought they had me — and they did," he said. "I couldn't have beaten that infringement suit — not until they'd put me out of business. They'd have got all our exchanges. That was what they were after chiefly. So — I went out and got as many of theirs as I could. Raeburn guessed I was bluffing — told me I didn't have the money to close my options."

"You didn't," said Lansing.

"Of course I didn't. That's where —"

"Oh, I see!" said Sandy chuckling. "That's where I came in. By Jove, that's some bluff! I — I swear I'd have made good for if you'd been called."

"There wasn't a chance — once you were here," said Hazzard scornfully. "I've played poker with Raeburn. I know his limit."

Then he turned to Lansing.

"Son," he said, "I'm going to pull you along with me. I handed you a raw deal at the start, but you've made good. I'll make your stock worth ten times what you paid for it —"

"Go ahead," said Lansing. "But — you can have the stock. I'll turn it over to you tomorrow for what I paid and the dividend you skinned me for. I've had enough."

Hazzard's whole manner changed.

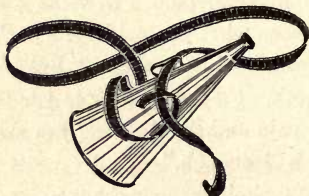
"Want to quit?" he said sharply. "*All* right. You've got to now. That's one thing I never let a man change his mind about. Give Brewer the figures — you'll get your check when you deliver the stock. Going to quit the movies, eh?"

"I didn't say that," laughed Lansing. "I'm

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going into the business myself. Put me down among your rivals."

Hazzard had proved himself clever. But he wasn't quite clever enough to know the truth when he heard it. Perhaps this was because his opportunities in that line had been limited in those wild days of the first great strides of the movies.



CHAPTER XI

ONCE Lansing's decision was made, his seemingly wasted hours stood him in good stead. He had picked up an astonishing amount of irrelevant knowledge that now acquired relevance. Best of all, it seemed to him, was his knowledge of just where to find Cliff Martyn. Martyn was a director — and he was the man of all men Lansing wanted for the actual making of the pictures he had it in mind to produce. He found him in a saloon near the ferryhouse at Forty-second Street and the North River, consorting with longshoremen and others of more uncertain occupation. Martyn had been doing what men usually do in saloons, and doing it to excess. But three hours in a Turkish bath a few blocks east restored him to his senses. He faced Lansing, across a chilled grapefruit and a pot of steaming coffee, wrapped in contrition and the voluminous sheet that is fashion's last word in Turkish bathhouses.

"I'm a bum, Lansing," he said earnestly.

"Sheehan's third-rail whisky's too good to go to pickling me. I know it — now. I tell you so. I'm ashamed of myself. But what's the use? Tonight or tomorrow night you could find me again — maybe not in Sheehan's, but if not there, in Mike's place, or Casey's or the Dutchman's."

"I think not," said Lansing, with decision. "Look here, Cliff — I need you in my business. A year ago you could have licked me maybe. Right now I could put you out in one round. And — that's just what I'll do if you get soused again till I give you the word."

Martyn straightened up and stared at him.

"What's the answer?" he said. "How do you mean you need me? It was only one thing I was good for — and I can't get a job doing that."

"Maybe not," said Lansing. "But the job's got you. Listen! Isn't that why you've been trying to drink up all the red liquor on the West Side — because you couldn't get back on the job?"

"Shouldn't wonder," said Martyn dismally. "What's the odds? I'm not blaming anyone. I was in with the first, with the old trust crowd. And then the independents offered me more money, and I quit. That's why the licensed people won't

take me on again. I don't blame them — they gave me fair warning. But these last people — stinting me on money and making me throw down people I'd hired in good faith — say, a yellow dog wouldn't stand for the way they acted! They were just looking for a chance to beat my contract — so when I got full — ”

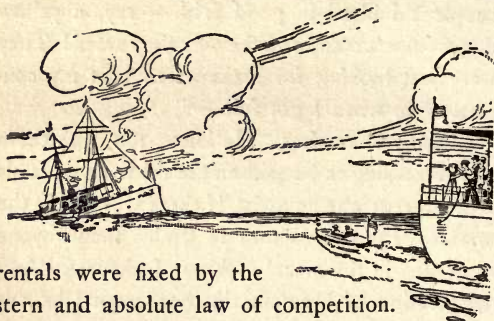
Lansing knew that. He knew, too, that there was something to be said on the other side. This man Martyn was an artist, if there was one in the movies. He came closer to genius than anyone concerned in the actual making of pictures. And the mention of his name in the Screen Club, at any hour of the night or day, would loosen a veritable deluge of stories about his temperament.

“Cliff Martyn?” Debrett had said. “The trouble with that guy is that money don't mean anything to him. When he's making a picture he isn't thinking about getting a profit out of it. His idea is to make the best picture there is, and hang the expense! He don't care how much sweating the business end has to do to make the film pay for itself or show a profit.”

Lansing knew this, believed it, and could see exactly how impossible it had been for Martyn's

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former employers to do business with him. The quality of any particular film had nothing to do with what it brought from the exhibitors. The



rentals were fixed by the stern and absolute law of competition. For a first run the price was so much a foot, and that price went down to the vanishing point with the passing of time and the release of the film to the little five-cent, two-shows-a-week houses. The system made for mediocrity, but it was the best one yet devised. Sometimes a manufacturer splurged and spent far more on the making of a feature than he could hope to get back. But he did it for a purpose, and charged the loss to advertising — which was a different thing from charging it to the artistic temperament of Cliff Martyn.

And yet, though he planned to start his enter-

prise on what Hazzard or any of the other big men would have called a shoe string, on a basis that would involve watching the spending of every dollar, it was this spendthrift of the films that Lansing wanted for his director. So badly did he want him, indeed, that he felt it would be useless to go on unless he got him. And the reason was that he, Lansing, was willing to stake all he had on his belief that he had discovered a new way to reach the public. He felt that he was going, after all, to turn his spade over in virgin ground.

"I want you to get straightened out," he said to Martyn. "I want you to go away from this town today — at once. Get back to nature. Get the alcohol out of your system. Get your skin clear and wipe the red lines out of the whites of your eyes. And while you're doing it I'll be here or hereabout, getting things ready. When I want you I'll send for you. I'll have a studio and a play for you to work with. And then I want you to make me the best moving picture that's ever been taken. I want you to forget every rule every other company in the business ever had and work out your own idea of what the public will like."

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"Gee!" said Martyn. "That sounds like a fairy tale. You mean you'd give me a free hand — money and all?"

"Up to the limit of my bank roll on money and without any limit every other way. If you want to spend money and I have to say no it'll be because I haven't got it — not because it would mean spending more than the film could make. Because — the way I'm going to handle this proposition there isn't any limit to the money the film can make. Get that? There isn't any limit to the money a first-class play can make, is there?"

"No."

"You bet there isn't! Look at some of the big successes just in the last few years. If the play's good enough it'll make the money. And I don't see why it shouldn't be so with a film. Now — are you willing to go in with me? You'll get enough to live on while the film's being made — which doesn't include anything for booze. So will I. Every cent is going into the production. But — you'll get an interest in the company I'm going to incorporate to handle this thing. The more money the film — and the others that follow it — makes, the more you'll get. You and

I'll be in the same boat. Now — does that sound like something worth doing?"

"Would a life belt look good to a man who'd fallen overboard in the middle of the ocean? I'll go you — and I'm beginning to see what you're driving at, too. I believe we can do it."

They shook hands very solemnly.

"But — look here!" said Martyn. "I mean every word of this — now. I know you've got the right dope. But — I've been hitting it pretty hard lately. How do you know I can quit? I don't know it myself. I intend to — now. But every man does when he's been boiled out in a hot room. I might fall off the wagon again any time."

"You'd better not. Because — you'll fall into a whole heap of trouble the first time you do. I meant what I said. The first time I see you tipping your elbow we're going to find out which is the better man, and if I can lick you, believe me I'll do it to the queen's taste. I'm not bluffing — I've got an idea that treatment's got the gold cure and all these slip-it-in-his-coffee-when-he's-not-looking powders backed off the boards for results.

"Heavens above, man! What is there for you

in being a tank? You don't enjoy waking up with a head that makes you want to put on the wastebasket for a hat when you go out to breakfast. You don't enjoy anything about this game. You want to get back — to have people talk about you as the man who *is* the best director in the movies, instead of as the one who might be or used to be. And you're going to be busy. When I send for you to come back you won't have time for Sheehan's or the Dutchman's or any other bar. We'll be working against time then to get the picture done before our cash gives out."

"I'll go you," said Martyn. "You're dead right. I guess there's a chance for me — because I never did like the stuff or what it does to you. If I've got something better to do I can let it alone. And I don't need any of that back-to-nature stuff, either. I'm ready to start work tomorrow."

"Work isn't ready for you yet," said Lansing. "And you may feel fine now, and think you're fit to do anything. But you're not. After a couple of days your nerves would begin yelling at you. I know just the place for you, and I guess I can fix it for you."

He had no hesitation this time in appealing to Sandy Brangwyn. He guessed that Sandy was about due at his camp in Maine, and he knew that Sandy made a point of respecting that State's best-known law while he was in residence there. There was no difficulty about the matter.

"Delighted!" said Sandy. "I get you, old top — what? He won't know a cocktail if he meets it outside the station when he comes back. You leave it to me. If I'd ever had to work for a living I'd have been a doctor — what? Old Doc Brangwyn! Bring him along to the train tomorrow — and then forget him. You won't know him when you see him again."

Lansing heaved a sigh of vast relief when he saw the little party off to Maine. Sandy was not without his faults. His best friends didn't call him brilliant. He had few ideas, very few. But when he got one it had plenty of room in his head, and it grew and filled the whole space. Lansing had no idea how Martyn would react to this somewhat heroic treatment. But he could trust Sandy.

And, for himself, he began to be very busy. He had to acquire the plant and equipment of his studio, nebulous, a thing that existed as yet only

in his own mind. And straightway he became a bargain hunter. He accomplished wonders, for he intended to spend just as little as he could until operations had begun. He knew how pitifully small his capital was for the enterprise he had in mind. Once more his stock of seemingly useless knowledge proved invaluable. Here, there, and everywhere he bought what had to be on hand before any sort of start could be made.

And then, cautiously, lest he give himself away too soon, he began negotiations for the right to produce the play he had fixed upon as the first production. It wasn't a new play, but it had been tremendously successful in its time, some years before, and so was reasonably sure to strike a familiar chord when it was advertised as he meant to advertise it. Moreover, it had been the vehicle of a star who had not scored a real success since it had closed its run. That had weighed heavily in his selection. He wanted a star of the legitimate theater, and he knew he didn't have money enough even to interest those who were reveling in current hits. This man he had in mind might be more willing to take a chance.

But, knowing Martyn and his temperament,

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Lansing postponed definite action in these matters until his return. Getting the studio into shape took a lot of time. Quite naturally, he had located it on his old stamping ground atop the Palisades. So his dealings with his prospective star and with the owners of the play he wanted were only tentative. He carried them only far enough to be able to lay a definite plan before Martyn when he finally sent for him. He was ready for his director in less than a month, and at the station he greeted a Cliff Martyn who had filled out and straightened up, whose eyes were white where eyes should be white, and not streaked with red, and whose skin was as brown as that of a healthy boy.

"No need to ask how you feel," said Lansing, with deep content.

"There aren't any words for it," said Martyn, breathing deep. "I haven't felt like this since Hector was a pup."





CHAPTER XII

THEY got down to work at once. Lansing had opened an office in a building near Longacre Square — not as imposing a procedure as it appeared to be just then, since office buildings were going up far ahead of a coming demand. The office was a modest affair; aside from Lansing himself, the working force of the Lansing Film Company consisted, at this time, of one stenographer. Lansing and Martyn sent her out to lunch and got down to business.

“You’d better tell me just what you’ve got up your sleeve,” Martyn began. “First — I haven’t got cold feet. I’m for you, first and last, and in the middle. But — if you’re planning to go into this game on a shoe string, you’d better save your stake. It can’t be done. The exchanges — ”

“Are all controlled by one group or another,”

Lansing finished it for him. "I know that. But the State's rights men aren't."

Martyn threw up his hands.

"Good Lord! If you'd told me you had that bee in your bonnet I could have choked you off — even if I had a hang-over!" he said. "To begin with, they're buying outright prints of foreign films. Practically all the big features the State's rights men are handling are from abroad. In a way, they're good, too. But you can't figure on them. I grant you can turn out better stuff — but not at a price those fellows will look at. Milano — Itala — all the big foreign makers — pay ten dollars a week where we'd have to pay fifty or a hundred. They get their supers for fifty cents a day — and we're lucky to get bum extras for three dollars. Everything's in proportion."

"You admit we can make better film —"

"Forget it; it doesn't make any difference. I've used that argument myself when I was fighting to spend five thousand on a picture that could be skimped through for five hundred. And the answer's the same one I always got — it's price that the exhibitor considers, not quality. He's got to. He's got a theater that holds just so many people.

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He knows the maximum receipts for any week, and after he's been in business long enough he knows what average deduction to make for weather and other things that affect his attendance.

"And he knows — the exhibitor — what his expenses are, too. He can't allow for any deduction there, either, you bet. His rent and his pay roll and his lighting bills go on just the same, whether he plays to capacity or to empty seats. He's got to make film rental a fixed charge, too. That's why he's glad to take a program from his local exchange. He *can't* pay more just because you offer him an extra good film. The public won't stand for his raising his prices. Listen — I'm talking against myself when I shoot all this dope at you. I'd like nothing better than to take a crack, just once, at making a picture without any limit to speak of.

"Gad — I'd like to see how a few ideas of mine would work out! And if there wasn't so much money, I'd have fun beating a skinny bank roll, too — showing you and myself and a few of the dubs that think it's clever to roast me what I can do. I'd put a few things over. But I won't let you go up against a game that's dead sure to

beat you. You'd do better to give Dave Steinman's faro game a play some night. You'd get quicker action — the suspense wouldn't be so bad for you, and you might have a chance to win, if Dave's dealer had an off night."

"Yes — I guess you've covered the ground," said Lansing, nodding. "That's about what everyone who's described conditions in the film game has told me. Only — they seem to forget that just because things have been done a certain way isn't any reason for doing them that same way forever."

"You said something like that before — and it sounded all right. But I was half doped then. And since I got away I've been thinking it over. You can't beat this exchange game in any —"

"Yes, you can — and through the State's rights men, in spite of what you say. Now I'll explain. We're going to turn out the best film we can, with the resources we've got. It won't be as good a film as we'd like, and as we'd get if we didn't have to watch expenses. But it'll be a better film than the public's ever been asked to look at in this country. And that's just what we're going to do — we're going to ask the public to look at it, the

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way it's asked to go to see Belasco's newest play, or the latest musical show.

"The way things are now people just go to the movies. They're beginning to get to want some particular actor or actress — only just beginning. Generally speaking, though, they don't know what they're going to see. They pay their nickel or their dime, and they find a seat and hope it'll be a good program. What sort of way is that to run a great amusement business? How long would the theaters keep open if they just hung out a sign and told people to pay their money and take a chance on seeing something good? Isn't that the way it is in the movies now? All John Smith knows, when he takes his best girl to the pictures, is that they'll see about six or seven reels — a couple of two-reel features, a one-reel comedy with a chase in it, maybe another one-reeler, and perhaps a topical weekly."

"All that's true — but what are you going to do about it? "

"Go to the public. Tell it we've produced a certain film. Put it on in a regular theater here in New York — on Broadway. Charge real money while it's there. Advertise it — a particular film,

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pecially written, specially produced, specially cast. Tell 'em before they go what they're going to see. Get the same sort of national publicity for it that a first-class play gets, so that people in the smaller theaters and the smaller towns will be waiting for it. Don't you see? The State's rights men will have to have that film. It'll draw capacity audiences — and they'll be willing to pay extra prices because they know they'll see an extra good show. Now do you see? ”

“ It might — yes, it just might get over,” said Martyn slowly, reluctantly. “ It's a way of getting around the way the game's being run now. But can you put it over? There's all sorts of things to be taken into account — ”

“ You do your part — give me the best film we can get for what we can afford to put into it. I'll guarantee to put my share over. It's a gamble — and if you can show me anything in the amusement business, from a penny peep show to a fifty-thousand-dollar musical extravaganza that isn't, I'll eat it. It's up to you, Cliff. Are you willing to put in your brains and your knowledge of how to make a picture, and your time — against what money I've got and my part of the work? ”

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"Oh, me!" Martyn dismissed the idea that he had anything to risk with a gesture of contempt. "I haven't been worrying about myself, Lansing. All I've ever needed to make me willing to jump in with both feet is to know that you've got some sort of a chance to come out ahead. And — I guess you've got that chance — about one in a hundred."

"That's enough," said Lansing, with decision. "If you can see the chance, too, even if it doesn't look any bigger than that, it's a cinch it's there. That shows I'm not absolutely crazy. Now, then — how about doing 'Crandall's Revenge' for our first feature — with Ralph Morgan as star?"

Martyn threw back his head and thought for a minute.

"Good enough, I guess," he said after a minute. "I see what you're figuring on — that people will remember the play just well enough to want to see it again. It was dramatized from a novel, wasn't it?"

"One reason I picked it. In the play some of the best stuff in the book couldn't be acted out — it had to be brought in as exposition — the characters just told one another that this and that had

happened. In a film we can act it all out, and more, too, if we need it."

"Right!" said Martyn. "I used to hammer at them all the time to buy the rights to good magazine stories for me to make into scenarios — and now they're beginning to do it. That's where the best films are coming from in the future — because those chaps know how to write stories. But about Morgan — I don't believe you've got a chance to get him. He'd want the key to the subtreasury."

"He hasn't had a success for five years — not a real one. He was in five different plays last year — and not one of them ran more than two weeks. He worked a lot, but it was at rehearsal, and actors don't get paid for rehearsals. I've got a hunch I can land him easily — but I wouldn't go near him till I'd got your O. K."

"All right — go ahead. He'll do, if you can get him. He's got the right sort of face, and I can wise him up on working for the camera. I'll read the book this afternoon and dope out the rest of the cast. With a star like that we can get cheap people for the other parts, and I know plenty of good ones that will do better work than this crowd

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that's beginning to think it's worth real money. I'll get Jim Blunt for the camera and Teddy Lathrop to help me and attend to props."

"All that's up to you," said Lansing. "I'm not butting in on your end of the game, Cliff. But the more people you can get who'll take small money now and take a chance on going up with us when we've made good —"

"I get you. Leave that to me. I know a few people who'd rather work with me for enough to live on than get big money where they are. You go on and get Morgan, if you can, and are awfully sure you've got all the rights to the piece. You don't want to be held up with any copyright-infringement stuff after you get going. And remember that a play's worse than a bit of land when it comes to a clear title. I've known plays that twenty or thirty people had an interest in."

They separated, each with his work cut out for him. So far, Lansing felt, he had done well — almost too well. He hadn't expected Martyn to acquiesce so easily and so fully in all his suggestions. But he guessed that Martyn's temperament was only sleeping, not dead; that it had been lulled by his month in the woods. It was pretty

sure to break out later under the strain of getting the picture ready. Moreover, it would be in touch with another artistic temperament then, if Lansing had any luck — that of Ralph Morgan.

It was easy to reach Morgan. In the old days the stage had been Lansing's chief passion, and a few minutes of telephoning put him in touch with a friend at The Lambs who promised to produce the star in the Knickerbocker bar within fifteen minutes — and kept his word. He introduced Lansing, and vanished discreetly.

Morgan was "at liberty," or "resting." Either phrase is technically correct, and either, being translated, means that the great actor was looking for a job. But, for a star, this is not a simple process. The theatrical world rests very largely on foundations of pretense. He — or she — who has once been a star may touch the borders of starvation afterward, but must never admit it. The star, needing an engagement, cannot ask for it. He must wait to be approached by some manager. Nor can he accept a lesser part to tide over a bad spell. It must be stardom or nothing. So there are stars, unluckily cast, as Morgan had so often been since his one great success, who could

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write instructive articles on how to live in New York on a fraction of nothing a day.

If Morgan was in this class when Lansing met him, however, there was nothing in his aspect or his manner to show it. Solomon, beside him, looked like a countryman after a misfit parlor has done with him, and the lilies of the field would have blushed had they been obliged to stand comparison with him. His tailor, it may be guessed, considered him a good advertisement.

"I'm afraid I'm only wasting your time by asking you to meet me, Mr. Morgan," Lansing began. Here, he knew, was an occasion for diplomacy. "I suppose your plans for the next few weeks are already made?"

"Well — ah — they might be changed, you know," said Morgan. "I fancy a chappie can always make a turn if there's a bit of 'oof in sight — eh, what?"

"I've noticed it," said Lansing dryly. "Well — I'll be frank. I and my associates wondered if you could be induced to do some moving-picture work?"

"My word!" said the actor. "I say — that is a bit thick, old top — 'pon my word, you have

got a cheek! I mean to say — thinkin' I'd act on a bally screen. But I suppose the screw's fairish — eh, what? What'll you Americans be thinkin' of next, I wonder?"

"About five million of 'em will be thinking about Ralph Morgan if you agree to my proposition," said Lansing. "Look here — I think you're about the best actor of your type we've got. I mean that. I always did think so, in all the rotten plays they put you into after 'Crandall's Revenge.' But —"

"I say — they were a bit high now, weren't they?" interrupted the actor. "I'm fed up with your Yankee managers; they're quite too toppish, and that's a fact."

"You've had bad luck. You made the hit of your life in 'Crandall's Revenge'; but that's being forgotten. Suppose you could get every one thinking again about how good you were in that? Suppose you could have another long run in that play? You'd be as popular as ever again, and the managers would all be after you, wouldn't they?"

"My word, yes, rather. But they won't revive it, old chap. My word — I've asked them

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to a dozen times. They say it wouldn't do at all — and give a lot of silly reasons."

Lansing rather prided himself on the way he reached that point. And now he fairly spread himself in the effort to make Morgan see what an elaborate film production of "Crandall's Revenge" would mean for him — the publicity, the renewed popularity.

"It would be better than a revival," he said enthusiastically. "A few weeks of easy work and it's all over. Making the whole picture won't take any longer than the rehearsals of a play — and then your part's all done."

"My word!" said Morgan. "You American chaps can talk — eh, what? But about the screw now — the oof — the bally coin, as you Americans say? Eh, what?"

Mr. Morgan talked, at times, like what he would have called a "silly ass, eh, what?" But in matters of money he proved himself singularly astute. He demanded, and got, a good deal more than Lansing had been willing to pay as a weekly salary. And he had a contingent interest in the profits of the film, too; one that promised to make him independent of managers for some

time, if Lansing's venture made good. However, Lansing was well satisfied. He could afford to mortgage the future, and Morgan was one of the principal reasons he had for feeling that he had a future to mortgage.



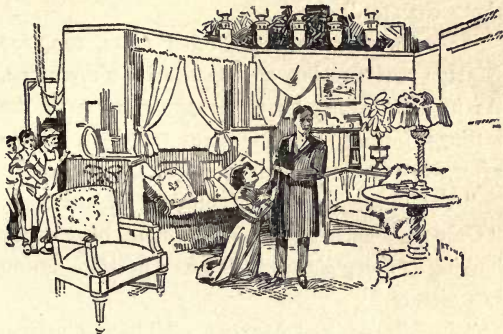
CHAPTER XIII

EVEN after Morgan was snared, a good deal of work remained to be done before Martyn could set the wheels finally in motion with his first cry of "Picture!" He and Lansing did forty-eight hours of practically continuous work on the manuscript, the working scenario, with relays of stenographers. With novel and play to work on, many changes, many adaptations, were still necessary. Lansing was rather appalled at the free way Martyn handled the material, but the director laughed at him.

"Doesn't make any difference how different it is," he said. "We stick to the main thread of narrative — and we give them the scenes they remember in the play. That's the point, it seems to me, though, of course, we're blazing a new trail here. A lot of people, of course, are coming to see this film because they remember the play. We want to satisfy them. But — if *all* the people who saw the play came to see the film we'd lose money."

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"How do you make that out? The play made three hundred thousand dollars."



"Yes — running about three years. Call it ninety weeks solid running. Suppose you allow fifteen thousand a week — and that's liberal. We've got to show to twice that many people to have a big winner, because we'll have at least twelve performances a week, and more likely twenty-one. No — we've got to figure on the people who didn't see the show — who only just heard about it. A lot of them will be movie fans — and we've got to please them. We've got to build this picture up for the people who've never seen the play. We're dealing with a new genera-

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tion. All we've really got to worry about is getting out a good film. That's why I'm making all these changes."

There were changes of other sorts, too, for Martyn was figuring on expense in every scene. As he went along he was making notes of the settings, jotting down ideas for exteriors. Scene after scene reminded him of some spot he knew.

"You're like a Baedeker guide," said Lansing. "Only you must have gone around New York looking at every place you saw as a possible setting in a picture."

"Sure," admitted Martyn. "That's my business. I'm like the man who sat down and cried the first time he saw Niagara. When they asked him why, he said he was thinking about all the power that was going to waste; and he didn't begin to cheer up and enjoy the sight till they told him that the power *was* being used."

Lansing had to laugh at the way Martyn schemed to save a single setting.

"It all counts," said the director. "It isn't just what it costs us to build the scenes, either. It's the time. That's where doubling up on exteriors counts. The salaries you pay go right into the ex-

pense record, you know, and I guess I've doped out ways of cutting the time of this production down by a week or ten days already — supposing we get some decent weather. You can make a scene look entirely different by changing the set-up — moving the camera. Remember, I don't say a good director, someone used to doing the same thing himself, wouldn't catch on. But not the public. And what they don't know won't hurt 'em."

"You're tarred with the same brush as Hazard and the rest of them," said Lansing. "Anything goes if you can get away with it. That's the motto of this whole business nowadays, it seems to me."

"Well, it's got to be our motto on this film," said Martyn. "Oh, you needn't worry! Give me some velvet to work on for the next production and I'll spend money so fast you won't be able to see it go. Say — I jewed Chambers down to forty-five. And he's been getting seventy-five from Western Film. If he hadn't had a row with Haines we couldn't have touched him. But Roche threw me down hard. There's a little girl that's going to wind up with real money. She wouldn't

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look at less than a hundred and a quarter, and I wouldn't sign her for that."

"For the lead, eh? I don't know, Cliff — I suppose we'll have to spend pretty nearly that, won't we?"

"Not if I can help it. I've got another iron or two in the fire. And I can get Roche at that figure any time I want her. She'd like to work with us, I guess. Trouble is, it's hard to get a woman lead with the right sort of face and enough experience for this sort of part. They've gone crazy with their long-haired, soulful-eyed *matinée* idols lately. About seventy-five per cent of the films you see released now are playing up someone like Warren Kerrigan or Frank Bushman."

Lansing had been waiting for just such an opportunity as this. Very casually now he made his first suggestion regarding the cast.

"Say — I used to know a girl who might do," he said. "I worked with her when I was learning the ropes. She looked then as if she might be pretty good when she got some experience. But she's never played leads."

"That wouldn't matter," said Martyn. "I'd just as soon have a woman that didn't know it all.

If she had the stuff I could bring it out. Who is this dame? ”

“ I’ll try to find her and bring her around,” said Lansing. “ Of course, it’s up to you.”

“ Of course,” said Martyn seriously.

Lansing grinned. And he didn’t blame Martyn, either. Yet from the beginning of this enterprise he had intended that Mary Brewster, the girl he had first seen on the ferry, crossing to Fort Lee, should play opposite to Morgan. He had never forgotten the impression she had made on him on that first day, when her intuition for the right effect had distinguished her so absolutely from the automatons who were obeying the orders that Haines flung at them.

He had seen a good many moving-picture actresses since then. He had seen good ones and bad ones, and many who touched all the notes that lay between those extremes. He had seen prettier ones than this girl — but he had seen none who were able to blur at all the sharp, distinct impression she had made upon him. He had taken the trouble to follow up the film in which he had made his first appearance before the camera, and had seen it two or three times in

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different theaters. And the effect of her quick, carefully calculated bit of business had been as sharp, as vivid on the screen as in the studio. Moreover, it had won its tribute of a quick catching of the breath from those who sat near him.

It had always surprised him that this girl had not been recognized — that no director had seen her possibilities, and done his part in making her famous. But he wasn't disposed to quarrel with his luck. From the beginning he had hoped that some stroke of fortune would delay her success until he could have a hand in it. Selfish? Of course! Lansing was pretty human. Nothing that has been told about him has been set down with any idea of making him appear to be what he was not. He had the ordinary merits and defects of mankind. And he had a consuming ambition, to which everything had to be subordinated.

So he was glad, as he set out to find Mary Brewster, that her name hadn't become a sort of household word. He expected her to be a big factor in that process of realizing his ambition to which he had already consecrated Ralph Morgan and Cliff Martyn. He wanted, very passionately now, to make good. Lansing's had gone down

again; the great store that his father had built up was closed, and this time definitely. The reorganization had kept it alive for only a few months. And he had heard echoes of talk that connected him with the failure. He wasn't blamed for it, but there was talk — a sort of intimation that he was like the sons of many other successful fathers. It wasn't only for the sake of having as much money as he had had before that he wanted to succeed, of course. Though, as a matter of fact, if this enterprise with "Crandall's Revenge" did fail, he was going to be poor in good earnest. Failure would mean the need of getting a job and a salary just to live upon.

He supposed that finding Mary Brewster would be a simple matter. But it wasn't. He took a taxicab to the address he had kept ever since that first day at the Western studio, forgetting, if he had ever known, the impermanence of such New York addresses. She wasn't there, and there was no one in the building who had ever heard of her. This was the first small check he had encountered since he had taken Cliff Martyn to the Turkish bath, and it annoyed him out of all proportion to its importance. Then he called up Haines, at

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Fort Lee — and found that he knew nothing about the girl and cared less.

“ I had to can her six months ago,” said Haines. “ She couldn’t get along with Miss Trainor; got to thinking she owned the studio, I guess.”

So he had to institute a regular search. This was unfortunate, for it seemed that he was the only man in the industry who thought of Mary Brewster as a real actress, and there were some suggestive glances that made him pretty angry when he made his inquiries. He couldn’t explain himself and his quest; on Martyn’s advice, reinforced by his own common sense, he had kept his intentions quiet. Hazzard had been angry at his desertion; Cramer and Howell, and the big interests behind them, blamed him because through his, Lansing’s, intervention, Hazzard had twice escaped the traps they had set for him. They were likely, he knew, to do all they could to beat him, once they knew what he was doing.

Here and there, in the course of three days of visits to the studios about New York, in Flatbush, over on the Palisades, in Yonkers, and the Westchester hills, Lansing heard of the girl. Always she had been around looking for work. But

he couldn't catch up with her, and the trail, anyhow, seemed to be about three weeks old. And then, one morning, when he had been to Coytesville, and was returning, just before noon, he met her in Manhattan Street. She was thin and very pale, and she was hurrying, as best she could, to catch the boat. He stopped her, and swore to himself at the hunted look that sprang into her eyes as she turned to face him.

"Miss Brewster!" he said. "I've been looking for you all over the place."

She remembered him in a moment.

"I haven't — I haven't been very well," she said. "I was going over early this morning to try to find something to do, but I had to lie down again."

Certainly she didn't look well. She looked shabby, too, which was worse, almost, so far as her chances of getting work went.

"Well — you've found something to do, all right!" he said happily. "I'm it! Look here — let's get into a taxi and run down to some place near here for lunch. Then we can come to terms. I'm not going to let you out of my sight, now that I've found you."

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He got her into a cab while she was hesitating. And, in the restaurant, he found out part of what was the matter with her. The girl was hungry. She tried to save her face with some remark about not having felt well enough to eat breakfast, but Lansing's intuitions had become sharper, and he knew.

"Look here," he said, after she had eaten, and when the food and the rich, hot coffee had had some effect. "I'm going to throw my cards down on the table for you."

He told her a good deal of his story, and she stared at him, wide-eyed, while she listened.

"Well?" he said finally.

"Oh — I think you're going to win!" she said. "I don't see why you shouldn't. I always wondered why you were working as an extra — because you didn't look at all as if you needed to. Most of the men who do that — well, you know!" She shrugged her shoulders to dispose of them. "But — where do I come in? Are you going to give me a little part, or some work as an extra? I — I suppose I haven't any shame any more. I need it dreadfully!"

"No — that's not what I want you for," he

said. "I've got an idea that you and I can help to make one another's fortunes, Miss Brewster. I think you might be, in six months, the best known woman in the movies. But it's all up to Martyn. I've told you about him — what sort of a crank he is. If you went to him right now he wouldn't look at you twice. You know — I don't mean to be unkind —"

Her face was crimson, but she nodded pluckily.

"I know," she said. "I look — oh, dreadful —"

"We'll make old Cliff the victim of a little conspiracy," he said cheerfully. "You're going to take this money and buy some pretty clothes. And you're going to dine with me tonight in some awfully swell place, where we'll feel like bloated millionaires just because they let us in. And in the morning you're going to put on the very nicest of all your new things, and you're coming down to the office with a hang-over of that millionaire feeling and let Cliff persuade you to play the lead in 'Crandall's Revenge'! Aren't you?"

"I — I oughtn't to, but I'll do whatever you say," she said weakly. And then, suddenly, she flamed up. "I don't care," she cried, "I think

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you're right, Mr. Lansing! I believe I am a good actress!"

"Now I know it's going to be all right!" he said triumphantly.



CHAPTER XIV

THE conspiracy was a great success. Mary Brewster managed to surprise even Lansing, such wonders had she worked with the money he had supplied. She had refused to take all he offered, but it was obvious that she had had enough. Martyn talked with her for five minutes, making little thumb-nail sketches of her, full face and profile. He dropped a book, seemingly by accident, and got the quick reflex action of her features. He tried a dozen other tricks with which Lansing, by this time, was familiar, tricks that aroused varying emotions in the girl, and so served to show the mobility of her features. And then he engaged her for the lead.

Picking the rest of the company was easy. Martyn, indeed, had practically cast the picture, except for the three or four really important parts, as he read the novel and made his preliminary schedule of the scenes. He made no attempt to get well-known people; he shared Lansing's belief that most of them were simply automatons, the

limit of whose ability was reached when they did exactly as a director told them. Moreover, those whose reputations hadn't yet been made were cheaper. Even so, the weekly pay roll was enough to make a capitalist with as meagre a qualification as Lansing's for the rôle gasp. But he didn't wince. Too much economy, he knew, would be as dangerous as the most wanton extravagance.

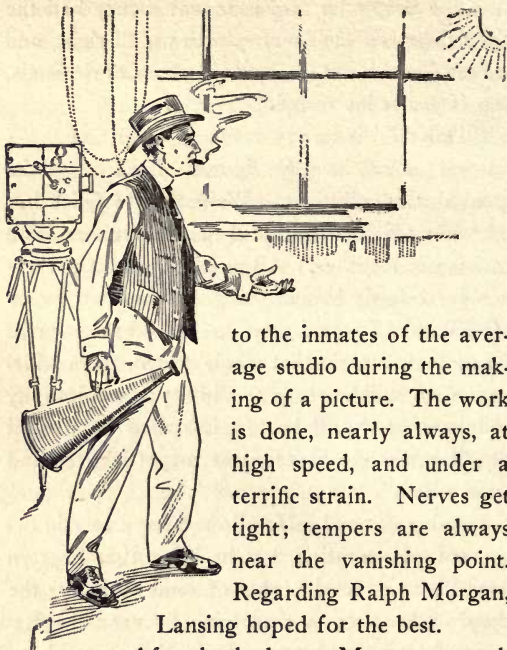
"Well," said Martyn, at last, "I'm ready to start! I've fussed around, and I've been slow — but I've worked that way on purpose. We don't want a lot of things turning up to hold us back after we do start, because the pay roll starts when we do. So I've tried to anticipate everything. I can't see any reason now why we shouldn't make a sprint out of this. Six weeks I'm allowing for the making of the picture, and you can go ahead with your plans for handling it on that basis. Allow another ten days, say, for cutting and piecing, and for putting in titles and inserts. We may save some time, but that ought to be an outside limit, barring accidents."

"It's up to us to bar the accidents, all right," said Lansing soberly. "The longer I stay in this game, Cliff, the more it's brought home to me

that the chap who said time was money had the right dope. Time's money with us, all right, and we can figure it out to about six places of decimals, too, if you're interested."

"Don't do it on my account," said Cliff. "I haven't got any head for figures. But I've got the general idea, all right. We've got to finish her up while the bank roll still needs a rubber band to keep it together. All right! Just at present you see a fairly human being. Tomorrow morning I'll have Simon Legree backed off the boards. By tomorrow night that whole crowd, from Morgan down, will be ready to slip rat poison into my coffee — but they'll be too scared to do it; and they'll work like blazes, just to get it over and done with!"

Lansing grinned. He allowed for a certain degree of exaggeration, but he knew that Martyn would have to hold a whip of some sort over the people who were to transform "Crandall's Revenge" from an idea to a five-reel feature photo play. Opinions might differ — they do, in fact — as to the degree of art in moving pictures. But he knew that even a grand-opera company couldn't teach very much about the artistic temperament



to the inmates of the average studio during the making of a picture. The work is done, nearly always, at high speed, and under a terrific strain. Nerves get tight; tempers are always near the vanishing point. Regarding Ralph Morgan, Lansing hoped for the best.

After he had seen Martyn at work Lansing's hopes waxed very high. Never before had he seen Martyn directing a picture. Martyn wanted no outsiders in the studio while he was working, and it had happened that Lansing, when

he was working as an extra man, had never found work with him. It was Martyn's reputation among film men, and the pictures of his making that he had seen, that had led him to choose him.

"Crandall's Revenge" began very quietly. On the first day there were no extras present at all, though Lansing knew that they had already been selected, and knew just when to report. The principals, when he got to the studio, were grouped in what the movie world knows, technically, as an "interior, parlor, wealthy." And Martyn, walking up and down and gesturing freely, was telling them the story of the play. He told it very well, describing the various climaxes that would be made in the film, and his reasons for various changes and alterations of the original novel and play.

Then he took up the characters in detail. In terse, picturesque sentences, he described the people who were going to move through the five thousand feet of film that would be the result of their work.

"Think of them as real people," he urged. "Then think of yourselves as having become those people. Get into these characters, so that you

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keep on acting your parts even when you're resting for lunch or waiting for your cue. Some of the best business, some of the best bits we'll have in this picture, you'll supply. If you imagine yourselves as really doing these things, really swayed by the emotions and ambitions of these imaginary people, you can't help giving little natural touches to your work that I'd never get. Maybe some directors wouldn't admit this, but I know it's so. I've never made a picture yet in which my actors haven't been responsible for about half the good stuff I got credit for."

Lansing went out and shook hands with himself solemnly. He thought of Haines, who didn't even let his people know, when they acted a scene, what its relation might be with the one before it or the one after it. He went off about his own work with a light heart. He felt that he could trust Martyn absolutely. Since he had returned from Maine he hadn't shown a single symptom of wanting a drink, and Lansing was ready to believe that his drinking had been due less to a craving for liquor than to a general and easily accounted for depression, that had made some sort of stimulant a necessity. He had heard of such cases be-

fore, cases in which hard, important work, with something vital at stake, had furnished all the stimulant necessary. Martyn had that sort of work now, and it looked as if he would be too busy even to think about his former resource.

And, meanwhile, Lansing's own work was cut out for him. Having no illusions about Cramer, Howell, and company, and not being too sure that Hazzard, too, wouldn't enjoy a chance to hurt him, he realized that he had a double problem. He had to keep his movements covered as long as he could — until all his arrangements were made. And then he had to get publicity for "Crandall's Revenge," and get it in large doses. Having given up deliberately the ordinary ways of reaching the public with his product, he had to organize his selling campaign, to put the thing in terms of commerce.

His theatrical knowledge, limited as it was, made him a little wary of New York. It might be easier to launch the film on Broadway; it was almost sure to be easier to get a theater in that Mecca of amusements. But — failure in New York would probably mean complete, irredeemable disaster. Many and many a play, as he knew,

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had gone to the storehouse after a single disastrous week or two in New York, when, had it been shown first on the road, it might have made a good deal of money. The road, and cities like Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia, will not accept a play that has failed in New York. But they do not demand the stamp of metropolitan approval; they will approve a play, if they like it, that has never been nearer Broadway than a try-out on the Atlantic City or New Haven dog.

Lansing wasn't sure that this precedent would hold good for a feature film like "Crandall's Revenge." As a matter of fact, of course, he had nothing to go by. The thing hadn't been done before, and he had to make his own precedents. But, on general principles, he decided to try for a theater in a smaller city first, knowing, as he did, that New York isn't half as ready to greet a new thing as it would like the rest of the country to believe — that it is the most hidebound, conservative old lady of a town in America, if only the truth were known. Not that he didn't entertain a considerable affection for his native city. He did. But he had no illusions about it, either.

There was another reason, too, for his decision

to stake everything on a try-out in another city. It would be easier to keep his potential enemies in the dark. Cramer and Howell, he knew, were very close to the great powers in the theatrical world. It happened that there was a temporary truce between the two embattled theatrical groups at this time. That would keep him from playing one against the other, which might prove desirable.

So, through Hazen, to keep the thing covered, he began to negotiate for theaters in two or three available cities. Also, he arranged for the printing of the positive films from the negatives that would come from the studio. He had no equipment for this, of course, but there were, by this time, various independent film companies that were glad to do the work, which held a comfortable profit. For various reasons, he split up the job, arranging to get a thousand feet from a plant in New York, another thousand in Philadelphia, and so on. This was important work. The long strips of film on which a photo play is taken are precious things, once they have been developed. And they are as fragile, as sensitive, as easily destroyed as they are precious. The task of printing the positive is a delicate one, intrusted to ex-

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perts in the manipulation of the almost human machine that does the work, with its spitting spark flaming blue in the dark room, so many times a second, recording a minute photograph with each flash of electric flame, while the film moves on.

There were chances for Lansing to make mistakes, glorious blunders. But, in the main, his was routine work, and not to be compared to the task that lay in Martyn's hands. What he had most need of was patience — which is the most useful possession of any man who is trying to do something unsanctioned by successful precedent.

Barring the possibility, and he considered it a remote one, of interference by some hostile interest, Lansing hadn't anticipated any real difficulty in getting a theater, wherever he chose to look for it. His plan was to open just at the end of the regular theatrical season, when road companies are ending their tours, and no new productions, except a few musical comedies, are being made. By so doing, he reasoned, he would find many theaters dark, closed for the summer. Rent goes on, whether a theater is closed or open. So do a good many other overhead charges.

"Let me put in my film — on the regular shar-

ing basis," was his proposition. "All you're gambling is the trifling cost of keeping the box office open and providing ushers and lights."

It seemed to him the sort of proposition that any alert manager would jump at — a chance to make money in what had always been a losing period of the year. But he encountered objections on all sides. The objections simmered down to one principal stumblingblock.

"I've got a first-class theater," said one manager after another. "I play two-dollar attractions thirty weeks a year. People know that I only book the best plays." This wasn't true, in nine cases out of ten; what that manager, and pretty nearly every other manager, did was to take what the central powers in New York sent him! "I can't afford to lower the tone of my house by letting in a moving-picture show. I can't have my house classed with the ten-cent movie theater around the corner. And I'd be a sucker to boost this movie game, anyhow. It's beginning to cut in on our profits. We're not selling half the gallery seats we were before all these cheap picture houses started up!"

Lansing had arguments to overcome every ob-

jection. But they weren't strong enough to conquer the managers — men who, as a class, are at once bolder and more timid than any other body of adventurers under the sun. It was pure luck, not skill, as he was fully ready to admit, that got him his theater at last. Hazen heard of the owner of a fair-sized theater in a city within fairly easy reach of New York who was in serious financial difficulties. It wasn't the sort of theater Lansing had hoped for, but it would do, at a pinch. He went to its owner, armed with his knowledge of the man's difficulties, and this time he got action.

"A year ago I'd have turned you down flat," said Roth. "But some one's been putting you wise to the hole I'm in. If your film goes over I might get going again. You can have the Apollo — but you got to give me five hundred dollars advance for an option. Then I'll give you the option — good for four weeks from date. I got to protect myself, see? There was a sucker talking about a summer-stock season —"

Lansing ventured to doubt it. But he wrote his check. It was the Apollo or an attempt to get a New York theater, and he fought shy of that alternative.

“ You can thank the crooked politicians in this town for your chance to get the Apollo! ” said Roth bitterly. “ Just because I wouldn’t pay the graft they were after they swore they’d get me — and I’m here to say they came near doing it! ”

Lansing knew that story. It was a sordid and not unfamiliar tale. Roth, enjoying the easily purchased favors of certain city officials, had quietly defied most of the building ordinances for years. New politicians, acquiring power, had undertaken an upward revision of the scale of prices for protection. Roth had refused to pay. Each side had been bluffing. The grafters had gone a little too far in giving publicity to the violations of the law at the Apollo, and had to make their bluff good. Though Roth yielded, in frantic haste, and agreed to pay the new scale, public opinion had demanded the alterations that were necessary to make the Apollo safe. The result had been a theater closed for ten or twelve of the best weeks of the season, canceled bookings, and the loss of enough money, when it was added to ruinously expensive changes in the theater, to put Roth in a bad hole. The plain truth was that Roth couldn’t carry the house until the opening

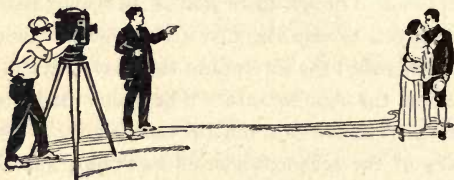
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of the new season unless something turned up, so he and Lansing were both satisfied.

But Lansing's satisfaction was tempered by a telegram that reached him at his hotel when he went back to pack his bag for his return to New York.

"Come at once," it read. "Your presence imperative."

It was signed by Mary Brewster. He did not enjoy his ride to New York. He knew, somehow, that this girl he had discovered was not the sort to be frightened without cause.



CHAPTER XV

HIS train was delayed, and he didn't reach the city until too late for a visit to the studio — so-called by courtesy. He called Martyn on the telephone and left word for the director to call him up. And then, to his annoyance, he found that he didn't have Mary Brewster's address. He waited, with as much patience as he could muster, for Martyn to call him up. But no call came. Still, he was not really uneasy because of that. Martyn might not have got his message — in fact, renewed telephoning to his boarding house proved that he hadn't. Any number of things might have kept him from going home.

But it was annoying, to put it mildly, to have to wait until morning to discover the reason for the telegram, and it meant a night in which sleep played a small and inconsequential part. Most of the hours of darkness were passed in intricate calculations. Expenses were mounting; unforeseen items were coming up with a regularity that was not less depressing because he had foreseen

something of the sort, and had tried to leave a safe margin.

Still, unless something really serious had gone wrong at the studio, Lansing felt that they ought to pull through. He had his theater now, and that had for several days been his chief source of anxiety. Now it was a comparatively simple question of finishing the film on the expenditure that his diminishing bank roll made possible. He was tempted, more than once, to remember his friendship with Sandy Brangwyn, who would advance any sum he might need. But he crushed that thought down remorselessly. He was willing to gamble with his own money, but not with Brangwyn's. And he knew that if Brangwyn put up money it would be out of friendship, and not at all because of any expectation of profit. And that was just what Lansing couldn't allow.

He woke up late, to his annoyance, having gone to sleep finally as dawn was breaking. He was irritable already, and the discovery, made by telephone, that Martyn hadn't been home at all during the night increased his irritability. He hit the Fort Lee trail a little late, and crossed, this time, with the aristocrats of the movies, who didn't have

to be on hand for the very early work. There were half a dozen famous stars, and several of them nodded to him. As a matter of fact, he knew about every one on the boat who was bound for the studios. His diligent haunting of the Screen Club had increased his acquaintance remarkably, and his brief connection with Hazzard had rather marked him.

By this time, too, every one in the game knew something about the picture Martyn was making. Too many people were engaged in it for it to be kept a secret. No one knew Lansing's plans — he had told those only to the very few whose cooperation was indispensable. And so, though his connection with the making of "Crandall's Revenge" was known, he had been able to cover such activities as his deal with Roth. Most of the wise players of the movie game thought the whole enterprise of "Crandall's Revenge" a colossal joke. They guessed that Lansing and Martyn intended to dispose of it through the State's rights men, and, knowing something of how much the picture was costing, amused themselves by speculating as to how much money its backers would lose.

But they liked Lansing, and he made up some

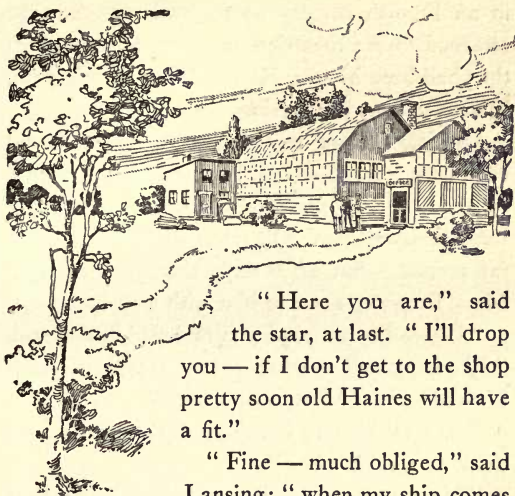
of his lost time by accepting one star's invitation to go up the hill in his automobile.

"I should think you'd have a boat of your own," said the star, with the frank disregard for money of one who had, less than two years before, been in vaudeville for forty dollars a week.

"Can't afford it," said Lansing, cheerfully truthful, and knowing that to tell the truth was the best way to practice deceit in any branch of the amusement business.

"Ha-ha!" laughed the star. "That's a good one!"

Lansing knew that he was supposed to be much better off than he was. He encouraged this belief, not because of any false pride, but because he hoped that Cramer and Howell would share it. If they did, they might be a little more careful, if they tried to spoil the success of "Crandall's Revenge." Their ignorance of the facts, both as to his finances and his plans, was one of Lansing's best assets. He hoped that they were counting on his comparative inexperience; that they thought, as Martyn had done in the beginning, that he was trying to follow a road that the failures of other men had already proved to be a blind alley.



"Here you are," said the star, at last. "I'll drop you — if I don't get to the shop pretty soon old Haines will have a fit."

"Fine — much obliged," said Lansing; "when my ship comes home I'll return the compliment."

He had only a short distance to walk. The studio was a makeshift affair, built up around the nucleus of an abandoned barn. And he was surprised to see two or three of the principals sunning themselves outside as he walked up to the office. Inside, Lathrop, Martyn's assistant and property man as well, was going over a list of small items that had lent verisimilitude to a scene

in an English country house, and must now be returned to the theatrical warehouse from which they had been hired. He nodded to Lansing and bent over his work again.

Lansing went on into the studio, which should have been a scene of bustling activity. It wasn't. Morgan, looking supremely bored, was reading a London newspaper. Others of the cast stood and sat around. But of Martyn there was no sign. Mary Brewster came to him with a rush.

"Oh — I'm so glad you're here!" she said. "It's happened — what I was afraid of when I wired! Mr. Martyn isn't here."

"So I see!" said Lansing. "What made you think he wouldn't be?"

"He was very peculiar yesterday," she said. "Especially after we stopped for lunch. Usually, you know, he grudges us ten minutes. But yesterday we were all back and waiting for half an hour before he came. And afterward we couldn't do anything to please him. He and Mr. Morgan had the most dreadful row! I was out of the picture for nearly an hour, while they made the club scene, and I slipped down to Hovey's and telephoned that telegram to you. I'd happened

to hear Mr. Martyn say where you were going to be. And — that's not all — ”

“ It's pretty nearly enough,” said Lansing grimly. “ Go ahead! ”

“ Mr. Martyn let us off early. He said we were all working like dogs, and he was tired of it. And he went off in a big touring car with Ed Rackett, of the Iris studio! ”

“ The dickens! ” said Lansing. He knew Rackett; every one did know the big Iris director, who had a reputation from California to Florida as a “ good fellow.” He and Martyn, as Lansing knew, had been great friends once. And — Cramer was supposed, since his break with Hazzard, to be one of the principal backers of the Iris Film Corporation. It didn't require the methods of Sherlock Holmes to lead Lansing to the deduction that his enemies had succeeded in striking their first blow.

“ All right! ” said Lansing. “ Good for you, Miss Brewster! I'll take hold right away.”

He went back to Lathrop.

“ Where's Martyn? ” he asked.

“ I don't know! ” said Lathrop. He lifted sullen eyes to meet Lansing's frank gaze.

"Yes, you do," said Lansing. "He's gone off on a toot, and you know it as well as I do. Look here, Lathrop — I suppose you figure that Martyn hired you, and you owe him your loyalty, and all that sort of thing. I don't know how much he's told you about this deal we're putting through. But I'll tell you now, if he hasn't, that it's big, and that we're working against time to get it finished. And — you're taking my pay."

"I don't know where he's gone," said Lathrop, still sullen. "If you think I'm taking your money without working for you I'll quit —"

"Forget it!" said Lansing. "Cliff's going to be just as sore at himself when he comes to as I am. He's got as much at stake as I have, too. What I want you to do is to go on in there and get those people to work. You can make a few scenes. Maybe he'll throw them out when he comes back, but the thing is to keep them working. It'll be demoralizing if they hang around and wait for him. And — if you know where to find Martyn, you'd better get word to him that I'm after him."

Lathrop got up.

"I'll put them to work, all right," he said.

"But we'll just waste the film. He'll never stand for any one's butting in on his work."

"All right — waste it, then. Anyhow, get busy. And call me up tonight at nine o'clock. I may need you. Here's my number."

He went down the hill then, and had recourse first to the telephone in Hovey's, the general store that had acquired a new lease of life and general prosperity since the movies had come. As he expected, the Iris studio reported that Rackett was "away." Out of town, it was believed. Then, systematically, Lansing called up every one of the places Martyn had been wont to favor. In none of them had he been seen. He called Mary Brewster, on top of the hill, and asked for what he had forgotten before — a description of the car in which Rackett and Martyn had left the studio. Here he struck his first bit of luck. Rackett, like most of the people connected in any way with the amusement business, thought of publicity as he did of food and drink. The car was a quiet, tastefully decorated affair, bright yellow, with touches of salmon pink. Mary Brewster thought there was, probably, only one such car in the world.

Armed with that piece of information, Lansing took up the trail. He telephoned to a Hoboken garage, that was sometimes called upon to supply cars for pictures, and hired the services of a chauffeur and a high-speed runabout. He stipulated that the chauffeur should have an intimate acquaintance with the road houses of northern New Jersey. When the car arrived the driver bent a judicial eye upon him.

"All alone?" he said. "I rather guessed you'd have company, and I brought a three-seater."

"That's all right," said Lansing, weighing him. "What's your name, and do you like twenty-dollar bills?"

"My name's Steve, and I eat 'em," said the driver.

"If we're pinched I'll put up bail, or pay double wages while you're in jail," said Lansing. "There's no telling just what we may have to do."

"Sure — sure not!" said Steve sympathetically. "I ain't got no use for these people that's always planning things out ahead. I'd rather not rob a bank, and if it's murder I'd like to select the corpse. But anything else I'll —"

"Only what they might call atrocious assault,

here in Jersey, and a little kidnaping on the side, perhaps," said Lansing. "Now listen. Suppose you'd started from about here yesterday afternoon in a bright-yellow car with salmon-pink trimmings — where would you be most likely to be now?"

"Was I thirsty when I started?"

"You were — and then some!"

"Well," said Steve, throwing in the clutch, "I might be one place, and then again I might be another. Let's go see. I'm beginning to make you, boss."

On the whole, Lansing felt, he had fared well in his chauffeur. Steve had the air of one who was in the habit of starting what he finished. And he did not seem to be overburdened with scruples. They started for the open country, where road houses lend a certain distinction to the rather flat rural portions of the State of New Jersey.

The way was long, and it was dusty. And yet it seemed that Ed Rackett had maintained a considerable discretion. They traveled many miles before their inquiries bore fruit. And then, not very far from Trenton, they came to a wayside inn that remembered the yellow car hopefully.

Hopefully, because its occupants had promised to return on the homeward trip.

"Very lively gentlemen, they were, sir," said the host. "They said they were going to cross the Delaware on the ice, like Washington, and hoped they wouldn't have to wait too long for it to freeze."

After that the trail grew warmer. Two road houses out of three, at least, fulfilled the function of blazed trees in a woods path. The way led them down into a country where the salt air from the sea mingled in their nostrils with the vigorous breath of the pines.

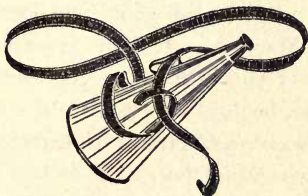
"I've got their number now," said Steve, in a place called Hammonton. He spoke with intense satisfaction. "They'll be in Atlantic City. That's where I guessed, but we had to make sure."

"Too bad," said Lansing. "If we have to do business on the board walk I'm afraid we may attract too much attention. But —"

"We'll invite 'em to some nice, private spot," suggested Steve.

They found the yellow car, minus one lamp, and somewhat bruised as to its mud guards, in a garage. And later they learned that even Atlan-

tic City, which is indifferent to most celebrations that involve alcohol, was disposed to sit up and take notice of Rackett and Martyn. Even so, it took some time to find them. But Lansing and Martyn came face to face at last, near the Inlet. Rackett was there, too, but he was not alert. It was easy for Steve to persuade him that they were old and bosom friends, the while that Lansing led Martyn down from the board walk to the beach.



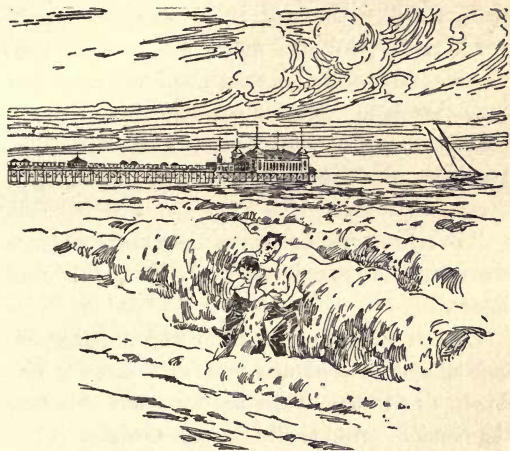
CHAPTER XVI

MARTYN remembered Lansing very well indeed, it seemed — only not as Lansing. In five minutes, down on the beach, with the surf pounding in his ears, Lansing heard himself hailed as Christopher Columbus, as Thomas A. Edison, and as Johnny Evers, of the Boston Braves, all, it seemed, intimate friends of Martyn. If the thing hadn't been so serious, so infuriating because of the possibilities of disaster involved, it would have been wildly funny. But Lansing didn't find it at all hard to overcome what little inclination to laughter Martyn's condition aroused in him. Disgust very soon overcame every other emotion. And disgust brought with it the desire for action. The case was one that called for heroic treatment, and it received just that.

Salt water, plentifully applied, worked wonders. Taking the chance of being seen from the almost deserted board walk, Lansing took his victim down to the water's edge, first relieving him of coat and shirt, and held him forcibly in a place

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where the big waves, rolling in, must break on him. At the first shock of the cold water Martyn almost got away. But Lansing was too much for him, and he had to take his medicine. Each wave



added to the effect; ten minutes, in which they were both soaked, did the work. Martyn was still far from being his normal self, but he had traveled a long way on the road back to consciousness and understanding, and he recognized Lansing.

“I don’t know how this started!” he said.
“Say — I’m sorry — ”

"You're not half as sorry as you're going to be," Lansing told him grimly. "And I know how it started, too. You didn't have the backbone to refuse to take a drink. Lord, I thought I could trust you!"

He said a good deal more, and it was an indication of Martyn's chastened mood that he did not resent anything. Martyn was humble, and he was contrite. And he didn't say a word when they got back to the board walk, and Lansing sent Steve for the car.

"Bring it to the bottom of the ramp that leads down from the board walk here," he said. "And hustle."

Rackett was surveying them with a glazed, inquiring eye. He wanted to know if Lansing was Martyn's friend. Then he wanted to celebrate the reunion. And finally he went to sleep. Martyn thought they ought not to leave him.

"It wasn't his fault!" he said generously. "I just happened to be with him, Bob."

"I know. And you're going to happen to go home with me, the same way. Don't you know yet that he laid for you? He knew you better than I did — and so did the crowd who sent him

to get you away from the picture! They knew you'd backslide the minute you saw a good chance."

Martyn was too tired to argue. And he was a good deal ashamed of himself, too. The salt water hadn't fully cleared his brain, because he had gone too far for any treatment to do that without a night's sleep to aid it. And he had no more than got into the car when he was snoring.

"This the kidnaping?" asked Steve. "Looks pretty easy."

"It was — but I couldn't know he'd come so peaceably. Don't worry, though. We'll get action before we're through. It's only postponed, not called off."

It was pretty late, but nothing was farther from Lansing's thoughts than spending the night in the resort city. His one object was to get Martyn back to the studio in time to start work at the regular hour the next morning. Lansing's mouth was set in a hard, straight line, and there was a vicious glint in his eyes. He remembered the combined promise and threat he had made to Martyn, and he was awaiting the time for its fulfillment. Steve drove on, with a cheerful disre-

gard for speed laws and his own fatigue, and Lansing waited. It was already a little light in the east when Martyn gave signs of life, and finally roused himself. He looked sheepishly at Lansing as memory came to him.

"Gee!" he said. "I guess I made an awful ass of myself! How did you find me? I'm glad you did."

"Stop her!" said Lansing to Steve. He turned to Martyn. "Feeling pretty rotten?" he asked.

"I sure am," said Martyn. "Never again!"

"That's what you said before," said Lansing. He took off his coat and slipped out of his seat. "Come on!" he said. "Remember what I told you would happen if you didn't stick to our agreement?"

"Oh, come on — I didn't mean to do it, and I'm sorry —"

"I keep *my* word!" said Lansing briefly. "Help him out, Steve. I'm going through with the atrocious assault now. I'm going to do a low-down, dirty thing. I'm going to hit a man when he's in no condition to give me a scrap!"

"Your funeral," said Steve indifferently, lighting a cigarette.

"Say — I'll admit I'm not feeling right," said Martyn dangerously. "But if you think I can't fight —"

"I hope you can," said Lansing cheerfully. "I can lick you much worse if you can put up a halfway decent scrap."

And he proceeded, very thoroughly, but very dispassionately, to make good his threats. He wasn't angry any more. He understood almost as well as if he had seen the whole affair how Martyn had been tricked into this breach of their compact. And he knew, too, that Martyn was still very much under the influence of the liquor he had drunk. He had seen drinkers like Martyn before. He understood the peculiar psychology that had been at work.

Martyn had kept sober as long as he had for several reasons. One was his own desire to make good, another his self-respect. But, among the others, a certain awe of Lansing had been, in all probability, predominant. He hadn't consciously been afraid of Lansing; he might, when he was normal, have forgotten Lansing's threats. But subconsciously, the impression of them had lingered. He had broken his word in a sort of

defiance curiously like that of a child deliberately doing what it has been told not to do. Nervous strain, exhaustion, had induced the mood. And if Martyn went back to work, he would be under a more severe nervous strain than he had yet undergone; he would come even closer to exhaustion. Lansing felt that it was vitally important to re-enforce that lurking fear that had helped to keep Martyn straight, so that, the next time the defiant mood came upon him, there might be something to offset it.

So there was nothing as petty as a desire to vent his anger in his determination to make good his threat. He was simply applying what he knew of psychology to the case, which did not prevent him from doing the business in a manner that evoked Steve's warm approval and respectful admiration. It was a most scientific thrashing that Martyn had to take.

"And never a mark on his face for any one to see in the morning," said Steve, when matters were settled.

"Exactly," said Lansing. "You'll feel better pretty soon, Martyn. Sorry — but it had to be done."

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*It was a
most scientific
thrashing*

Martyn said nothing at all. But he was thinking pretty hard. On the ferry, as they crossed to Cortlandt Street, he turned to Lansing suddenly.

"I understand, I guess," he said. "If I go wild again the way I did before I started out with Ed Rackett I'll remember that scrap. I wish you'd been around. Morgan drove me crazy. Say—I think he's trying to make trouble. His contract's binding, isn't it?"

"As much so as any contract," said Lansing. "But I wouldn't worry about him, Cliff. Keep hold of yourself, and everything else will be all right."

"I've had my blow-out," said Martyn, flushing. "Lord — feel that wind, coming up off the bay!"

Lansing gave Steve Martyn's address. When they came to the boarding house he had a new idea.

"Go in and pack some fresh clothes in a bag, Cliff," he said. "Then we'll run up to my joint. You can have a cold shower there, and I guess we can all do with some breakfast. I'll cook that myself."

It was so ordered, except that Steve insisted on doing the cooking. And while he filled the little apartment with the savory smell of frying bacon and hot coffee Lansing made Martyn lie down, and pounded and rubbed and kneaded until his skin glowed pink, and the muscles were smooth and resilient.

"Now the shower — cold, as it runs!" he said. "Then you'll feel like a new man."

Over his second cup of coffee, he yawned luxuriously and looked at his watch.

"The way of the transgressor is hard, Cliff," he said. "Time for you to be off. Take him over to Fort Lee, Steve, and drop him at the studio."

Martyn stared at him.

"Aren't you coming?" he asked, astonished.

"I? Lord, no! I'm going to turn in. I've got some arrears of sleep to make up, thanks to you, Cliff."

"I suppose this chauffeur wouldn't let me go anywhere but to the studio?" said Martyn, after a minute, sullenly. It was a last flaring up of the devils of nervousness and desire that had precipitated his escapade.

"You haven't got any orders like that from me, have you, Steve?" said Lansing. And the driver shook his head. "Don't be a fool, Cliff!" Lansing went on. "What happened last night's rubbed off the slate. You're not going to do it again. You're going back, and you're going to work more like a dog than ever. By the way — I haven't had a chance to tell you. I got the Apollo."

Martyn's eyes brightened. His hand came out heartily.

"Now that's something like," he said. "Good

work! Bully for you! Come on, there, Steve, I've got to get on the job."

From the window, Lansing watched them drive off. His last thought, before he dropped off to sleep, a few minutes later, was of Cramer and Howell. Their first blow had failed to strike home. Where would the next one be aimed? But the thought didn't keep him awake.



CHAPTER XVII

LANSING slept through most of the day, and woke up, hungry and fresh, about five o'clock. Another icy shower finished the process of refurbishing, and he went downtown for a sort of combined breakfast and dinner. When Debrett passed through the restaurant he hailed him. He liked the cynical little journalist — there really is no other word to describe him, much as Debrett would have resented such a title, after his newspaper training. If Debrett was looking out for the main chance all the time, and if he had few scruples as to how he got money, so that he got it, he was frank about it, at least, unlike most of the walkers of the Rialto.

"Hello!" said Debrett. He sat down and gave his order. "I've been meaning to look you up. What are you trying to bring off?"

"Nothing much," said Lansing innocently. "We're just making a feature that looks rather good to us."

"So?" said Debrett. "You've got Cliff Mar-

tyn for your director. You've rigged up a patchwork studio. You've bought the film rights of 'Crandall's Revenge,' and you're making a five-reel feature of it. Cliff went on a bender night before last, and you followed him down to Atlantic City and brought him back. Before that you took a lease on the Apollo Theater in Adelphia and gave Max Roth five hundred dollars to bind the bargain. And you haven't been near any of the regular people who buy or lease films — State's-rights men or exchanges or any one else. Anything else about your recent movements you'd like to know?"

Lansing gasped, and stared at him. And he had supposed that his tracks were well covered! Debrett sat and grinned.

"How do you know all this?" Lansing asked finally.

Debrett closed one eye and opened it again in a prodigious wink.

"I've got my own sources of information," he said. "And one reason is that I've never split on any one who told me anything — and I never will. If you ever get into this game that's something to remember. You don't need any morals — I

gave 'em up years ago. You can get away with about anything short of murder or sticking up some guy that's got a pull at head-quarters. But — if you start blowing on the people that give you tips you're through. It's enough for you to know I know all this. If I know it, some other people do, too. And if you can think of any one who's in a position to crab your game because they know you'd better act accordingly. I haven't told you anything — see? ”

“ Yes, I see,” said Lansing. “ And I'm just as much obliged as if you had. Is that about all you know? ”

“ Ye-es,” said Debrett regretfully. “ It is right now. But by tomorrow I ought to be able to tell you the size of your bank roll.”

“ I think *not!* ” said Lansing, with decision.

He understood the significance of the statement. And he had known from the first, anyhow, that it would be vitally important to keep possible enemies from discovering the real thinness of the ice on which he was skating. Debrett, of course, had really told him a good deal. He had strengthened the inference Lansing had drawn from the attempt to corrupt Martyn. Some one was suffi-

ciently interested in his movements and plans to have spied upon him — very successfully. It was a fair guess that from now on matters would move fast; that there would be a definite attempt to prevent the finishing of "Crandall's Revenge," and, if that failed, to prevent its production.

There was every reason, as a matter of fact, why there should be such an attempt. The more Lansing thought of his method of reaching the public, greater did its possibilities seem to be. And it threw open the whole movie business to a host of people who hadn't yet seen a chance to dabble in it. If he succeeded, and he felt sure, now, of success, any one with the money to spend could follow in his footsteps. He would bring about the open market at which Hazzard and his enemies alike had scoffed. The little theaters would no longer be obliged to take what the exchanges chose to give them — they could take what they liked, wherever they liked. The whole industry would have to turn to the production of good films, quality films, and the possibility of a vast, closed corporation, making ninety-five per cent of all the films released, would pass forever. Not that this condition wouldn't come anyhow, whether he

failed or succeeded. He knew it would, and had seen it almost from the beginning. But — he wanted to be the pioneer, the man who blazed the trail.

Debrett hadn't improved his appetite. He hurried through the rest of his meal and made an excuse to get away from the man, who had half a dozen suggestions for the rest of the evening. As he left the place he caromed into Hazzard, who caught him by the shoulder and held him fast. Hazzard was in one of his most jovial, expansive moods. He bore Lansing in with him and planted him at his table, roaring as he did so, so that every one in the restaurant turned to stare at him. But when he really began to speak his voice couldn't be heard at the next table.

"Look here, son!" he said. "I handed it to you pretty rough when you said you wanted to sell your stock. I thought you were scared. But I guess you weren't. If you're going to stay in this business, we ought to be together. I'll make you a proposition. Bring this feature you're making along and come back. It can be released under one of our brands, and then you won't be taking any chances. You can turn in a statement of what

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it's cost you as far as you've gone. We'll make good on that, and take over any contracts you've got."

"Sorry," said Lansing. "But this is my own gamble. I'll have to play the hand as it lies."

Hazzard's face was swept by one of those sudden storms of passion, so terrifying to those who were not used to the man, which he seemed always to be able to call up at the right moment.

"You've seen me in action," he said savagely. "What chance do you think you've got against me if Cramer and Howell, with all that's behind them, couldn't beat me? I'm giving you a chance to come in out of the rain — and I'm telling you it's going to rain pretty hard!"

"I'm sorry," said Lansing again, "but I'm hanged if I see where you come in, Hazzard. By George, I think you've got an awful gall! You think I've got a good thing, and you try to hold me up for a piece of it by telling me you'll try to break me if I don't hand it over! Isn't that the size of it?"

It was a long time since any one had defied Hazzard in such fashion. He was purple with anger, and the veins in his forehead were swelling.

"You can't bluff me, you know," Lansing went on, getting angrier and angrier every second. "That's how you beat Cramer and Howell — and you wouldn't even have had the chance to bluff them except for me. I'm going to keep on minding my own business, and if you don't want to get hurt, you'd better do the same thing. Good night!"

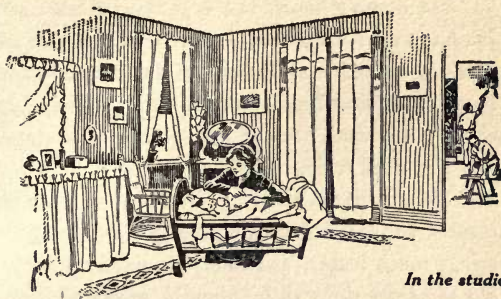
The quarrel with Hazzard wasn't of his own seeking; but, as he went out into the street, Lansing knew that it had done him a world of good. He had been close, at one time, to falling under the spell of Jim Hazzard's personality. Even now, he admired the big man as much as he had ever done. But his admiration was all for the primal, brute force of the man — for his remorseless smashing through whatever barriers might lie between himself and his desire. And the fact that he had suddenly become such a barrier was bound to temper Lansing's feelings. He felt a sort of contempt for Hazzard as he strode uptown, working off his anger with the exercise. But the contempt lasted only until the first flush of his anger wore off. For he knew that Hazzard could, and would, fight if he had to — that there were other

weapons in his arsenal that could be called upon if bluff failed.

"Even if they beat me, between them, they won't win," he thought, as he walked on. "Some one else will come along and do what I couldn't do."

The thought only stiffened his resolution. He decided that he wouldn't fight the worse for knowing, positively, that he had enemies. A new joy of battle came to him that mingled with the delight he had begun to feel as he realized that he was actually doing pioneer's work. He swung aboard a bus finally and climbed to its top. All the way up Riverside Drive, he could look over to the Palisades and see the flaming lights of an amusement park, a sort of Coney Island in miniature. That glare of light was in the very heart of the film colony. A little to the north of it was the very heart of his enterprise. So he thought, as he looked. He was wrong, of course. The heart of that enterprise was wherever he himself happened to be.

He found Martyn at home, tired and cheerful, exhausted and optimistic. And, though it savored of cruel and unusual punishment, he kept the di-



In the studio

rector up for three hours, talking over their task.

"I guess my break didn't do much harm," said Martyn. "Teddy took hold in fine style — so far as I can see, the scenes he made will fit in all right. We've made something over thirty-five hundred feet of film. I suppose we'll have to make nearly as much more. Then I'll start cutting. It's a big wastage, but I'm trying some new things, and I've had to give myself room to make a choice here and there. About three weeks more ought to see us through. Your Brewster girl is a wonder. Morgan's better than I ever dreamed he'd be — but he's cutting up, just as I told you."

"What's his trouble?"

"He doesn't know, but I guess it's the rush. He has to get an effect in ten feet of film that he uses up ten minutes to get on the stage — and he can't use that English accent of his to help out, either. He can't see the importance of footage, and I'm tired trying to make him see it.

"But you needn't worry. We're coming on all right. Morgan's beginning to get the hang of things much better, and today he sized up a couple of scenes right all by himself, without a word from me. Brewster bothers him a little — he knows how good she is. But he doesn't quite see why, and it makes him fretty. Of course, he hates me. I suppose that over in England they have comic-paper Americans, like our comic-paper Englishmen. And he thinks I'd make a fine model for a series, all right. When this is over I'm going to buy him a drink and —"

He stopped, flushing.

"Take him to tea somewhere — it'll make more of a hit with him," suggested Lansing, with a grin. "By the way, Cliff — I don't want to rake up what's over with. But you thought Ed Rackett just happened to come along. Listen!"

And then he told him of his talk with Debrett.

Martyn, of course, knew Debrett very well, and he listened, with rising anger and wonder.

"You see, we thought we were being careful," said Lansing. "But we weren't careful enough. Now you can go to bed."

"How about Roth?" said Martyn thoughtfully. "Think you can trust him? Don't you suppose it's he that's given away that part of the game?"

"I don't see why he should," said Lansing. "I don't trust him — or distrust him, either, for that matter. Seems to me he doesn't count at all. And I suppose there are plenty of ways they could have found out I was doing business with him without getting it from him. I think he'll play fair for he needs us as badly as we need him. If the picture makes good he saves his theater and gets a new stake. If it doesn't he's done."

"Well, he'll bear watching, anyhow," said Martyn. "I've just got a hunch that that's our weak spot. You want to make awful sure that nothing can keep us out of the Apollo when we're ready."

"I wish everything else were as sure as that!" laughed Lansing. "So long!"

CHAPTER XVIII

LANSING was up and out early the next morning, with a score of trifling things to keep his morning occupied. He saw two or three men who might do for the important job of getting scientific publicity for "Crandall's Revenge" in its new form; publicity specialists, these, and far ahead of the old-fashioned press agent. These men he sounded cautiously and tentatively; until he made his choice, he didn't intend to be lavish with information. And other tasks kept him busy until lunch time, when, foregoing that pleasant meal, he crossed the river and made for the studio. Not once all morning was he where he might reasonably have been expected to be, and so all of Martyn's frantic efforts to reach him by telephone had been vain.

He knew something had gone wrong as soon as he saw Martyn's face. When he went in a scene was being made. Mary Brewster was working alone, at the moment, in a close-up, and Martyn didn't check the action to speak to him.

Sitting on his stool, just under the camera, he glanced around once, and went on. But his face was eloquent, and it spoke of trouble — of trouble spelled with a big T. And when the scene was finished he turned to Lathrop.

“Get the extras and make that scene of the run on the bank — the exterior,” he directed. “The set-up’s all ready. We’ll need about a hundred feet — we’ll be cutting back and forth, and we can repeat on some of the action.”

Lathrop nodded and sprang into life, vitalizing as well the group of extra people who were lounging at one side, and Martyn came over to Lansing.

“Did you get any of my messages?” he asked. Lansing’s face supplied the negative answer. “Morgan’s quit!” said Martyn.

“Quit! What do you mean?” said Lansing slowly. “Why — he can’t quit! He’s got a contract that would be binding in any court!”

“Well — he’s quit just the same! Don’t tell me he can’t — because he’s done it. Suppose his contract is binding. You can go ahead and sue, and get damages, maybe. What good will they be?”

Sometimes, it is said, a man who has been shot will go on for several seconds, perhaps even longer, without knowing that he has been hit. Something of the sort was true of Lansing now. For a minute he was filled with the idea that it was impossible for Morgan to have quit, because he could be held liable for breach of contract. Absurdly, the thing that brought him to his senses and made him realize the truth was a sudden memory of George Ade's old quip about the man whose lawyer visited him in jail! "They can't put you in jail for that!" said the lawyer indignantly, when he heard the charge. And the man in the cell answered that that might be so — but that he most certainly was in jail!

From that point to the full realization of what Morgan's desertion meant, and the need of instant action, didn't take a second.

"I thought you'd get it!" said Martyn grimly. "Either we get him back, or thirty-five hundred feet of film and three weeks of solid plugging aren't worth a counterfeit nickel!"

"There's no chance to double him?" He knew the suggestion was futile, even as he made it. Martyn shook his head impatiently.

"It would be ten to one against our getting a ringer for him that would fool anyone for a hundred feet," he said. "And, if we did, Morgan or whoever got him to quit would give it away. You can guess how quickly it would kill the film if people thought we were working such a game as that!"

"No — we can't do that," admitted Lansing. "We've got to get him back. He's one of our biggest assets — even if we could retake all we've done. Featuring the original star of the original production —"

"They've got to him, of course," said Martyn. "He'd never have thought of anything like this by himself — the shrimp! They've made it worth his while, every way, to clear out — promised him as much as he stood to make with us, and a good bit more!"

"The damned little fool!" said Lansing savagely. "He couldn't see that the biggest thing he stood to win out of this film was another chance to make a great big hit. The regular managers would have been standing in line to get at him if he'd made good in this —"

"We don't know who's done it," interrupted

Martyn. "But you want to remember that Cramer and Howell, just for instance, have pull enough with the theatrical syndicate to get anything in reason. Couldn't they have promised Morgan a fat part — as fat a part as Crandall was when the show was turning them away?"

"Of course!" said Lansing bitterly. "Oh — it's easy enough to see now what a chance we gave them with Morgan."

"Yes — and I guess we know now where they found out all you were doing, too! You didn't keep very much back from Morgan, did you?"

"No! I had to tell him everything we were planning to get him to take a chance!"

They stared at one another for a minute. Each of them hated himself, blamed himself for the disaster that had overtaken the whole enterprise. For it was a disaster. Unless they got Morgan back they might as well acknowledge defeat. There wasn't money enough in reserve to finance the retaking of half the film, involving loss of time and a staggering addition to the pay roll.

"Roughly — what's the footage of the scenes you've still got to take that Morgan has to be in?" asked Lansing finally.

"I'll figure it up," said Martyn. He got his working scenario and began to make calculations on a pad. Martyn might be temperamental, but there was never a moment in the taking of any picture when he could not calculate his footage to a nicety. One of the things that had been a bone of contention between himself and former employers was his waste of film, but it was a highly methodical waste, always.

"About seventeen hundred feet," he said, looking up, when he had covered a page with figures. "He's off stage a whole lot in parts three and four, and the first of five. The last five hundred feet, of course, all centers around him and the woman lead."

"Can you cut that any? And could you make all the scenes he's in in a bunch — shift the others forward and get along without him till you were ready to go right through? And how long would it take you to do all the scenes he was in — working as hard as you could?"

"I can't cut much. The order of the scenes doesn't make any difference, if we look out for changes of costume and keep a record of all details, to duplicate exactly. And it would take

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eight days — maybe seven — to take all his scenes." Martyn answered the questions; then asked one of his own. "Why?" he said. "What's in your mind?"

"I'm not sure yet," said Lansing. "I'm trying to dope this thing out. All I know is we've got to get him. I'm trying to have any information that may be useful handy. And so far I don't even know where he is!"

"It's a lovely mess," said Martyn. "Well — shall I go ahead? If we don't get him, every scene we take means that your bank roll gets just that much slimmer — and you might need it for a new start."

"No — go ahead!" said Lansing. "I'll worry about a new start when I have to make it. Well — I'll be off. It's a cinch the first thing to do is to find out where that rat is now."

"Right!" said Martyn. "I'll go see how Teddy's getting on with that exterior."

Lansing started for the trolley. But he hadn't gone far when Mary Brewster's voice stopped him.

"Mr. Lansing!" she cried. He stopped and turned, and she came running toward him, her skirts flying in the wind, and here eyes, heavily

blackened, showing her anxiety. Somehow, even in the sunlight, which is not merciful in such matters, her painted face didn't look ridiculous.

"Mr. Morgan's gone, hasn't he?" she asked, when she came to him.

"He's taking a little vacation — that's all," said Lansing.

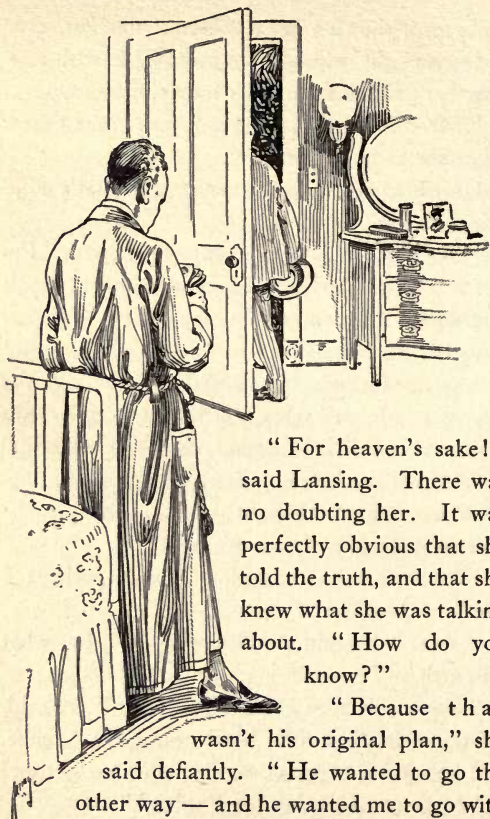
"Mr. Lansing!" She stamped her foot. "I'm not a fool — and I'm not a child, either! Don't you suppose I want to see you win? And perhaps I know more than you think! Anyhow — I saw Mr. Martyn's face, and I saw the way the two of you looked when you were talking! Isn't it so? Hasn't Mr. Morgan broken his contract?"

"I think he thinks he has," admitted Lansing, after a moment's thought. "But I hope to be able to make him change his mind."

"You won't," she said. "But — perhaps I can."

"You!" he said wonderingly. "Why, what on earth —"

"You don't even know where he is," she said. "I do. He's in a little hotel near Fifth Avenue, and he's going to sneak on the *Baltic* tonight and sail tomorrow morning for England."



"For heaven's sake!" said Lansing. There was no doubting her. It was perfectly obvious that she told the truth, and that she knew what she was talking about. "How do you know?"

"Because that wasn't his original plan," she said defiantly. "He wanted to go the other way — and he wanted me to go with

him. He said if we went West we could get married somewhere where they weren't particular about a license, and have a trip around the world. I turned him down — pretty hard. I told him I couldn't even think of leaving before the picture was finished. I thought that might make him stay."

"Well — I'll be jiggered!" said Lansing. Then he seized on the salient point. "A trip around the world, eh? He must have got hold of some real money. Well, we can guess where it came from."

"I'm afraid so," she said. "I — well, I didn't think he'd really do it. But, of course, I knew, when he didn't turn up."

"What hotel is he at?" asked Lansing curtly. "I'll get over there right away —"

"You will — if you take me with you," she said. "We've got to get him back, and I can see what you're planning in your eye. Wait a minute — I'll tell Mr. Martyn I'm going, and wash my face."

He had to wait, and she was back in five minutes, as a matter of fact, so that they had plenty of time to catch the next car.

CHAPTER XIX

ON the car, on the ferry, in the subway, when they had crossed the river, Lansing protested that it was his affair; that he, and he alone, should have the handling of Morgan. But Mary Brewster was adamant, she was firm. And then, within a block of the hotel, she exercised her feminine prerogative and changed her mind.

"You go first," she said, "I don't believe you'll be able to do anything, because I know they must have gone pretty far to get him to quit like this."

So it was Lansing, alone, who went in and asked for Mr. Robinson, that being the undistinguished alias that Morgan had chosen. It served him ill in this case, for expecting visits only from those who were in his confidence, he had taken no precautions. Lansing was shown up to his room at once. The actor was walking up and down nervously, and at the sight of Lansing his jaw dropped. But he recovered himself at once.

“What ho!” he said. “You’ll have a drink — what?”

“No,” said Lansing. “Look here, Morgan — what do you mean by this? Don’t you realize that that contract you signed with me is binding? You’ve absolutely no excuse for breaking it that a court would consider for a minute —”

Morgan waved that aside.

“My dear chap — what do we know about the bally courts? That’s what we have solicitors for — eh, what? But you know, you deceived me. False pretenses, it’d be called, I dare say! Of course, you didn’t mean to do it, my dear old chap, but you know, the silly ass of a law doesn’t care what you mean. It’s what you do — what?”

“How did I deceive you?”

“Why, you made all sorts of promises. I dare say it was all your American swank, you know — you Yankees are rippin’ at that — top hole, you know. You jolly well did have me on. I fancy I’d have gone on believin’ it all, too, if those other Johnnies hadn’t explained it all. I mean to say, I’d have gone on thinkin’ I was goin’ to get lots of oof, and never dreamin’ your bally old cinema show wouldn’t even be shown once.”

"Whoever told you that lied," said Lansing quietly.

"Oh, no, my dear old chap — you mustn't say that, you mustn't, indeed. They're no-end friends of yours, these other Johnnies. They understand it all, and they want to keep you from — now, what did they call it? Holding the valise? Keeping the sack? Holding the bag. That was it."

"Suppose you tell me who told you those things?"

"Oh, no, old chap, couldn't think of it."

For nearly an hour, then, Lansing employed every resource of the English language, as he spoke it, without making the slightest impression on Morgan. The actor absolutely refused to discuss the legal consequences of his flight. That sort of thing, he said, must be left to the lawyer chappies. Lansing was baffled. He didn't know whether Morgan, bought off, and understanding precisely what he was doing, was playing a deep game, or whether the man was really the fool he seemed. But he decided that the last theory wouldn't hold, because the only absolute fact that emerged was that he hadn't budged Morgan an inch.

He had had some idea of bluffing — of pretending that he could have Morgan arrested. But he abandoned that even without a trial, because it was so infernally obvious that Morgan was not to be bluffed. Moreover, his reiteration of the hopelessness of going on with the picture did ring true. It made Lansing uneasy, after a time. Perhaps the opposition did have something up its sleeve, and had confided its plans to Morgan. In that case, he might not even have been bought off; he might, instead, be playing the true rat's part of deserting a sinking ship.

And there was nothing to be done. He stood by the door, at last, looking at the actor, immaculate, insignificant, in this wholly undramatic setting, wondering that he and his whole enterprise should be so absolutely at the mercy of this one queer, illogical creature. He wanted to spring on Morgan, to take him by the throat and shake him until he promised to finish his work. He knew that it wouldn't do any good, but he was close to doing it, none the less, for the sheer satisfaction of hurting this man who had him so absolutely in his power. Just then the telephone sounded, and as Morgan went to answer, that mood passed.

"Hello — are you there? Who is that?" asked Morgan. "Oh, I say — is that you? My word! Lansing? Yes. Rather — I'll tell him. Half a mo'!"

He turned to Lansing, visibly excited.

"It's that rippin' Miss Brewster!" he said. "She wants me to put you through to her."

Lansing jumped for the telephone without ceremony.

"You've had plenty of time," said Mary Brewster's cool voice, unmelodious still, but not unpleasant. "Bring him down here to me, and we'll see what I can do. I suppose you've failed?"

"Absolutely," he answered. "I think I'd have throttled him if you hadn't called up. Where are you?"

"Downstairs," she said. "I'm glad I didn't wait any longer. I was afraid you might get violent."

She laughed, and broke the connection.

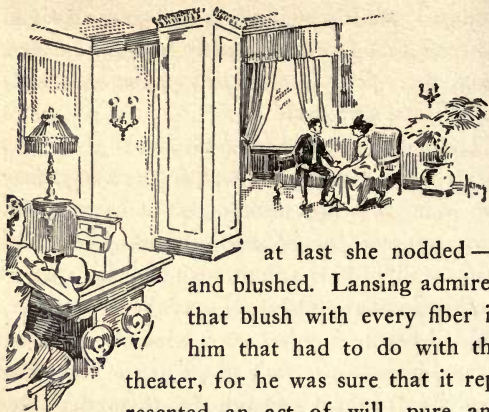
Morgan made no objection to going down. He had remarkably few nerves, but the interview was beginning to affect them.

"Right-o!" he said. "Come on, old chap. Sorry, you know, about your bally old cinema.

You quite made me believe it was quite all right. But now that I've explained it, you quite understand, don't you? I mean to say, you see there's no bally use goin' on? "

Lansing sighed and followed him to the elevator, without answering. And, in the lobby, they met Mary Brewster. She smiled at Lansing and made a grimace that bade him efface himself. And then she slipped her arm through Morgan's, while a fatuous smile spread itself over the actor's face, and led him to a sofa near a window. Lansing planted himself in a chair where he commanded a good view of them, and surveyed them morosely.

He couldn't hear what was being said, of course. But he could see. Mary did most of the talking at first. She spoke vigorously, and, Lansing judged, without restraint. Once or twice Morgan protested, in a sudden rush of words, but she silenced him quickly each time and went on. Suddenly his face lighted up, and he half caught her hand. But she drew it away and talked quickly again for a minute. Then she let Morgan assume the burden of the conversation. He seemed to be pleading; she shook her head repeatedly, in negation of something he was pressing her to do. But



at last she nodded — and blushed. Lansing admired that blush with every fiber in him that had to do with the theater, for he was sure that it represented an act of will, pure and simple. And then Mary jumped up and came toward him, beckoning, and Morgan followed her.

“I say, old chap — I may be a silly ass, you know,” he said. “But I’m going to see you through, since you make a point of it. It won’t be a bally bit of good, you know, but — well —”

“Mr. Morgan and I are engaged — sort of,” said Mary, blushing again, as she met Lansing’s amazed and horrified eyes. “It’s a provisional engagement, and it may be ratified the day ‘Crandall’s Revenge’ is finished.”

Morgan beamed. He expected congratulations obviously, and Lansing, feeling very sick, shook his hand with an affection of heartiness.

"Owe it all to you, you know, old chap," said Morgan. "Never have met the dear girl, except for you. Tell that Martyn chappie I'll be over at the studio in the mornin'."

Lansing was angry and bewildered and filled with a profound admiration for Mary. But he wanted to shake her, too, and he felt no exultation at all at the thought that Morgan would finish the picture, after all. For the first time, perhaps, he was considering Mary Brewster as a woman, a girl — a thing of flesh and blood and the other human attributes, anyhow. Hitherto she had just been an actress whose unique talent he himself had discovered. He had to readjust his whole conception of her, and he didn't have much time for the task.

"We've got to run along now — Ralph," said Mary. "You'll be over tomorrow? You won't let them make you change your mind again?"

"Word of honor!" he promised. "But — I say — aren't we even going to have dinner together?"

"I never dissipate while I'm working," she laughed. "And we're only provisionally engaged, you know! I've got to make over a dress tonight that I'm going to wear tomorrow. So I'm going to let Mr. Lansing take me home."

Morgan thought it wasn't quite right, but while he was making up his mind what to do about it, Mary and Lansing got away. And, in the street, he turned on her furiously.

"I won't have it!" he stormed. "If that's the only way to keep him here let him go back to England or to Timbuktu if he likes! I won't let you sacrifice yourself that way to save the picture —"

"You've got nothing to say about it!" she told him, with spirit. "Haven't I got something at stake in that picture, too? Don't you realize what it means to me to have it a success? I've never had a real chance before. Every time I've had a part I've lost my job because I couldn't — I simply couldn't — do what I was told by some stupid director when I knew a way that was a thousand times better. I'd do anything to have this turn out a success —"

"Well — you've done it!" he said grimly.

" Even to pretend to be engaged to that miserable rat — "

" He's nothing of the sort ! " she said furiously. " It isn't his fault if those people have lied to him and he's believed them. Even now he thinks going on is a waste of time. They've told him something that's made him believe ' Crandall's Revenge ' will never be produced."

" I beg your pardon," said Lansing stiffly. " I didn't understand that you might have had some other motive than the success of the picture — "

" Oh ! " she said, and was speechless for a moment. " You — you're just a *man* ! But I don't think I ever did know one before who didn't understand quite so many things ! Good night, I'm going to take this bus ! "

They were at Fifth Avenue, and she sprang on the low step of a bus just as it began to move, leaving him staring after her. He was full of anger and of admiration at once. And suddenly a curious, amazing thought came to him. Was it possible that he was jealous ? When he had never, until that afternoon, thought of her except in the most impersonal way ?

CHAPTER XX

BUT, though it was true enough that hitherto his thoughts of the girl had been impersonal, Lansing understood perfectly that it could never be true again. He realized, with a sort of keen, stabbing pain, that she had come to fill a very great space in his life, a space that had always before been empty. He recalled, now, the day when he had found her, after his search for her. She had been hungry, then, and shabby. It was with a very real shame that he remembered his momentary relief at finding that she had not advanced in her work; that she had, indeed, failed utterly, so that she was available for his own purpose.

He had enjoyed, of course, the opportunity that circumstances had given him to make her accept the help that he had offered, for there had never been any sort of question in his mind as to the absolute refusal with which she would have met any offer of help from him or any other man had such circumstances not existed. And he could

trace now, as he looked back over the strenuous time that had elapsed since then, the change in his feeling toward her.

In the beginning he had been interested in her simply because of the possibilities he saw in her. It had not been until he saw her daily that he had begun to appreciate those inherent qualities that lay under her ability. But he could see now, of course, that the enthusiasm for the picture that she had shown was all of a piece with the way in which she threw herself into the part she was playing.

And he could see something else; something that had to do with his own recognition of her ability, and that might, in some measure, explain the blindness of Haines and the other men who had overlooked it. Essentially, down at bottom, she was the sort of woman he had always hoped to find. She could feel things as well as understand them. And she had a high courage that had held her up in spite of failure and discouragement, that had led her to ignore the opportunities that, he knew, must have come to her; opportunities the very thought of which, in the light of what he knew of the moving-picture business, and of

men like Ed Rackett, made him flush with a hot anger.

There was, he saw, a spiritual kinship between them. Why, she looked at this enterprise as he did! A thousand things that she had said, during the long talks they had all had, came back to him. Even more than Cliff Martyn she shared his own enthusiasm. She hated and resented, just as did himself, the thing that had threatened to cheapen the newborn industry and strangle it before it reached its growth; the thing that she herself had put into words for him one day.

"It's the same everywhere," she had said. "These movie people don't say: 'What can we do? What can we produce that people will want?' but: 'What can we put over? What can we make them stand for next?'"

And now she had saved the day for him. After all, his feeling when he understood what she had done was the real touchstone. He *was* jealous. And he was baffled, too, and mystified by her anger. Had she really meant to defend Morgan? Was it possible that she cared for him? Lansing gave up the riddle in despair! He had little choice, indeed. There was so much for him to

do in the next few days that he had to try to put the girl from his mind. But he couldn't do it. She was in his thoughts permanently, and he stopped, after a time, his perfectly futile effort to banish her. He wanted her, and it took all his strength to concentrate his mind on the work he had to do.

In the task, however, he had the whole-souled and enthusiastic aid of those who were on the other side. For the enemy began to show his hand openly now, or, at least, as openly as a due regard for the laws against conspiracy allowed. And, as the taking of the picture progressed toward the end, Martyn and the rest were compelled to let Lansing himself do all the other things that had to be done.

Martyn, delighted by Morgan's return, and caring so little about how it had been brought about that he was not curious enough even to ask a single question, switched his plans. He rushed the making of the scenes in which Morgan figured, as a precaution against another desertion.

"We'll use him while we've got him!" he said.

He adopted heroic measures, too, and a sort of camp was established at the studio. There Mor-

gan, protesting bitterly, had to spend his nights as well as his days. Martyn managed that, with a little help from Mary Brewster. And the studio was practically under martial law. Martyn averaged about four hours of sleep a night now, and Teddy Lathrop, who worshiped him, got little more. Suspicious characters, and in the eyes of Martyn and Lathrop everyone who wasn't working in or about "Crandall's Revenge" was suspicious, couldn't get past the wire fence Martyn had built.

Martyn and Lathrop practically stood guard all night, and they had the able assistance of a pair of dogs of uncertain lineage, afflicted with insomnia, and utterly without faith in human nature.

"Not that I think they've got the nerve to do it," said Martyn. "But I don't know anything that burns any quicker than film, and someone might just happen to drop a match. We'll take no chances, anyhow. I read a story about some guy that retook about three reels of film in a week, and maybe it can be done — in a story. I'm not hankering to set any record like that, though."

Three minor characters folded their tents and

silently stole away in the week that followed Morgan's return. But they could be doubled — that is, other actors were brought in, made up to resemble the deserters. More serious was the sudden disappearance of a property automobile — a plain case of theft, perpetrated, probably, before the increased vigilance of the guards. The car had been a find, in the first place — it went back to the early days of the automobile industry. Martyn, on seeing it, had instantly visualized the laugh it would get, and had assigned to it an important part. Now, when it was needed for later scenes, it wasn't to be found.

“ That's the trouble with a thing like that ! ” he raged. “ People see it, and it's a good thing — it impresses them. And they remember it. You know how important that car is in the action. We've got to get one like it — that's all ! ”

But this was easier said than done. Martyn did the talking, and turned to some other task, leaving Lansing to do the work. An inspiration saved him. A classmate in college had been the son of a famous automobile manufacturer. Lansing fled to Detroit overnight, amused his friend with the tale of his difficulty, and found the mate

of the lost car, carefully guarded in the museum of a great factory. At that, he nearly had to steal it, but he prevailed upon the company to lend it to him at last.

“ Think of the publicity! ” he said. “ You see — the idea is that Crandall gets the old car out when it hasn’t been used for fifteen years. It runs as well as ever — and we’ll give you an insert, with the name of the car. It’ll be worth thousands to you! ”

He got the car — and didn’t realize, until later, that the publicity would be double-edged — that “ Crandall’s Revenge ” would cut a considerable figure in the advertising of that particular car during the life of the film.

Lansing was too busy to visit the Screen Club or the eating places that were the haunts of the moving-picture men very often. He saw Hazzard once or twice, and Hazzard regarded him always with a good-natured, tolerant, pitying wonder. Debrett was gloomy; he didn’t speak out, but did suggest that what had happened was only a beginning. And one night, Brewer, with whom he had worked for Hazzard, and who was still Hazzard’s right-hand man, found him.

"You're playing the fool, Lansing," he said. "You haven't got a chance."

"Oh, tell Hazzard I'm not the scaring sort," said Lansing wearily. "You people make me rather tired."

"Hazzard's got nothing personal against you," said Brewer. "And, say — you want to understand that you're up against a whole lot more than Hazzard. You've got the whole industry lined up against you. Men you don't even know by sight are working to queer your game. And they're going to get you. Hazzard hasn't got any choice. He's working to protect himself, rather than to smash you. He knows you can't win out. And that's why he's offered to save your hide by taking you back with us."

"Nothing doing!" said Lansing. "I'll believe that there are others in this game, but it isn't going to make any difference. If Hazzard wants to line up with the crowd that has been looking for his scalp just to get me, why, I think I ought to be flattered."

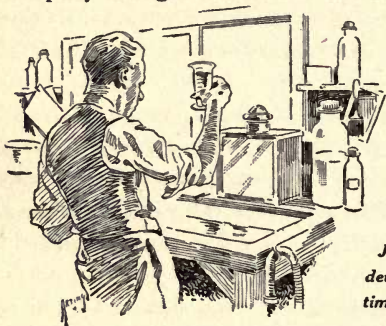
"I didn't say he was with them," protested Brewer. "But he may feel he's got to go in with them, before he's through. You're marked for

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slaughter, that's all. It won't make much difference to you who uses the ax, you know."

"Exactly," said Lansing. "Good night, Brewer!"

Luck and good management combined to avert most of the threatened dangers. Most of them were petty enough. After the automobile inci-



Jim tested his developer every time he used it.

dent, Lathrop checked off his properties every night, but small things turned up missing at almost every roll call. Some of the people of the cast, some of the extras, two or three of the carpenters and sceneshifters, quite obviously, had listened to the siren song of the enemy's campaign fund. The trouble was to determine who was guilty. Two hundred feet of perfectly good film were ruined

in developing — and after that Jim Blunt tested his developer every time he used it.

Blunt, incidentally, though he got less glory, worked as hard as anyone. He was at his camera all day long, and half the night he spent in developing film, in the small but perfectly equipped dark room. He, too, slept at the studio. And one morning, after a hasty trip down to the river for a swim, he appeared, with a satisfied smile and skinned knuckles.

“Big Jim Hazzard’s man, Brewer,” he said, “offered me a job out on the coast. Offered me a bonus to start West tonight. I pasted him one. He pasted me back, and then we had breakfast together, and he sent his regards to the boss.”

These were pin pricks. Gradually the disloyal ones were weeded out. Martyn and Lansing, after consultation, took the rest of the force into their confidence, and after that volunteer watchers took a lot of the burden of protecting the plant from assault.

“They’d finish this film without another pay day, now!” said Martyn. “Of course, I picked some lame ducks — but most of this crowd I chose, knowing we were liable to run into trouble.”

"They've got life jobs, the whole lot of them, if we pull through," said Lansing, with enthusiasm. "And I believe we are going to. The opposition must be beginning to see that they're wasting their time."

But not five minutes later, as he left the studio, a slinking creature, with furtive eyes and visible breath, accosted him, and slipped a paper into his hands. It was the summons and complaint in an action for breach of copyright — and gave notice of an attempt to secure an injunction against any public performance of "Crandall's Revenge."

The papers had been drawn, it appeared, at the instance of one Charles Hoover. Lansing had to search his mind for a moment before that name began to mean anything to him. But then he remembered that he had, soon after the fact that he intended to produce "Crandall's Revenge" became known, received two or three letters from Hoover, demanding recognition as one of the authors of the original play. The man had no standing; Lansing had satisfied himself abundantly as to that, having had Martyn's warning in mind.

His first instinct was to laugh at the summons. But the papers, so far as he could judge, were

properly drawn, and they bore the name of a famous legal firm; a firm that had been involved in many great cases. And Hazen's manner, when the lawyer saw the papers, dispelled any tendency on Lansing's part to give way to mirth.

"Bad business!" said Hazen, frowning, as he went over the complaint. "I don't like this; and I've been a little afraid that something of the sort might come up."

"But the fellow's got no rights," protested Lansing. "You'll find no trouble in beating him, will you?"

"That's not what's worrying me," said Hazen. "There's no sort of question as to the soundness of our case. But suppose this ties up your production?"

"You don't mean to say they can get an injunction?" said Lansing incredulously. "The play's been in stock ever since Morgan dropped it, and this fellow's never done anything about it — and he's never collected any of the royalties, either. It's a strike suit."

"You needn't tell me that," said Hazen. "But it's not so very long since a man who held about one share of stock tied up a hundred-million-dollar

bond issue by United States Steel. He didn't have any better case than this chap, but he was able to hold them up. Figured he'd be bought off, probably, but he wasn't. They could afford to fight, and spent a year or two at it. Probably you can beat this, too, if you take the time — but they'll get their temporary injunction."

"It's an outrage!" exploded Lansing.

"In this case — yes. But it doesn't always work that way. The courts are pretty free with temporary injunctions on the theory that it's better to prevent any possible injustice. Probably they'd make this fellow Hoover give a bond. You can guess how much trouble he'll have getting it."

"Well, what am I to do?"

"I don't know yet. There ought to be some way to beat it, but I don't want you to think it's going to be easy. When a man can get a firm that includes an ex-secretary of state, a United States senator, and a former judge of the court of appeals of the State of New York to handle a case like this he's probably covered most of the loopholes."

"Hazzard's firm?" said Lansing.

"Exactly." But the lawyer's eyes lighted up.

"Still, I've crossed swords with them once or twice before, and I haven't always lost, by any means. Give me a night to think about it."

Having no choice, Lansing gave him the night. Martyn wasn't surprised.

"I was afraid of it," he said. "I remember this chap Hoover. He collaborated with Redfield on 'Crandall's Revenge' — the play, you know. It was Redfield's novel, and Hoover was a good hack playwright, the sort who'd take a scenario and hand over the first act next day."

"That's what Redfield told me when I closed the deal with him," said Lansing. "He paid him outright — Hoover never was supposed to get any royalty. Never claimed any, either, while the play was running. Redfield told me that when the play was making such a mint of money for him he handed Hoover a hundred-dollar bill once in a while, out of charity."

"He's been down and out for two years — touched me for a half dollar even after we started this picture," said Martyn thoughtfully. "Wonder how he's living now?"

"You might ask Hazzard. He could tell you — if he would — I guess."

"I suppose so," mused Martyn. "Say, Hazard sent for me today. I wasn't going to pay any attention, but now I think I'll go see him. If your ears start tingling you'll know I'm telling him a few choice things about you."

"Better look out!" advised Lansing wearily. "He's a tough bird, Cliff."

"So'm I," said Martyn briefly. "You go and hold Hazen's hand. But take it from me, all the lawyers in the world aren't going to call Hoover off in time to do us any good. You'd better tell Hazen to figure out some way to beating that injunction after its been granted. Something like the time when old Larry Lajoie jumped the Phillies and landed in Cleveland with the American League. They respected the injunction — sure! He got some days off every time the schedule took Cleveland into Philly for a series with the Athletics."

"Copyright's in the Federal courts — and their writs cross State lines," said Lansing. "Still, Hazen's pretty good. If there's any way of beating this game he'll find it."

"Maybe so," said Martyn. "But what we need just now is a lawyer or a conjuror or some-

one that can find a way when there isn't one. Shall I give your love to Hazzard?"

Lansing grinned, and let him go. He was determined to be very cheerful, very optimistic. He refused to worry about this latest attack until he had to. And he went home trying to hypnotize himself into believing that Hazen would find a way.

It was about midnight when the insistent ringing of his telephone roused him. He answered it sleepily, resentfully. And his resentment wasn't lessened by the discovery that it was Sandy Brangwyn who was at the end of the wire.

"For heaven's sake, don't you know I'm working these days, Sandy?" he said irritably. "I've resigned from the all-night society!"

"You'd better reconsider," said Sandy, with undiminished good nature. "Your little friend Martyn's trying to corner the available supply of the demon rum. I've been hearing about him since ten o'clock — he's making quite a dent, even for Broadway. I've just caught up with him, here in Priest's. Come on down, and I'll leave word for you, if I can. Anyhow, I'll stick right to him, and telephone for you back here, if he moves on."

Lansing was wide awake now.

"Thanks, Sandy," he said. "I apologize. You're all to the good. I'll be down as soon as I can get dressed."

His thoughts were lurid, as he flung himself into his clothes. He might have known that Hazard would overcome Martyn! But surely Martyn had behaved, since his trip to Atlantic City, like a man who could be trusted. He hesitated for a minute. After all, was it worth while to go down? Was there any hope that he could influence Martyn again? But he went.

In his play time, in the days before the failure of Lansing's he had been able to find his way about among the white lights, though he had never made a cult of the pursuit of pleasure that goes on under their glare. But even in the comparatively short time that had passed, things had changed. He saw few familiar faces as he entered Priest's. A new generation of pleasure seekers seemed to have sprung up. There was a message for him; his "party," the boy at the telephone told him, had gone on to a noisier place. For nearly an hour, while the crowds everywhere thinned out, Lansing wandered about, always find-

ing messages from the faithful Sandy, but never quite catching up.

At last, however, Sandy met him at the door of a place west of Seventh Avenue — a place he could not have entered alone, since the legal closing hour had passed. Sandy's easy "Friend of mine, Bill," proved sufficient, however, and they passed into a dark, narrow passage.

"Easy, Bob!" said Sandy. "You want to go slow here. Hazzard's just come in. He's pretty happy himself, and he's opening wine as fast as they can bring it. Tried to ring me in on the party — said he remembered my face, though he didn't know why. I slipped out. I think he's trying to get a little souse away from Martyn. Martyn's ugly. He's come up to me about six times and threatened to punch my head — said he knew what I was doing, all right — that I was watching him, so as to tip you off. Then he said he hoped I'd do it — that he'd like a chance to tell you what he thinks of you."

"Wonder if I couldn't look on a bit without being seen," suggested Lansing.

"I've spent money enough here to have a pull," said Sandy. "I'll see."

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This was a place where such a request did not seem strange. It was easily arranged, and Lansing smiled sourly when he saw his quarry. Martyn sat with his arm about a fat, bloated little man — Hoover. And he was defying Hazzard.

“ All li'l' palsh togesher! ” he said. “ Go 'way, Hazzard! Tryin' shpoil party! ”

He seemed to be overcome suddenly by a sort of futile rage. Also, he was quite sure that it was his mission in life to care for Hoover. First he denounced Hazzard. Then, with an abrupt transition of his mood, he grew tearful, and promised to see that Hoover was at Hazzard's office next morning. He would send him by parcel post, if necessary, he promised. Hazzard considered the matter, gave up reluctantly, and moved ponderously to the door. Brangwyn, scouting, watched him into a taxicab. And then Lansing advanced openly upon Martyn. Not more than a dozen people were left in the place now, and these were concerned with their own affairs.

Martyn was not too far gone to recognize Lansing. Nor was he abashed. On the contrary. He began at once a tirade of abuse. Lansing, he complained, was a slave driver. He wanted to

deny to those who worked for him those common rights — life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness — guaranteed to all free-born Americans by the Constitution. Lansing didn't have a chance to get a word in edgewise.

"That's the stuff, ol' boy!" said the admiring Hoover. It was a long time since anyone had made much of Hoover; Martyn's friendship had gone to his head quite as much as had his potatoes. But these had been busy, also.

"Suppose you cut out this foolishness, and come home," said Lansing savagely.

"Home!" said Martyn suddenly stricken. The word struck some responsive hidden chord. His shoulders shook, and he covered his head with his hands. "Home!" he said tearfully. "Hoover, look at tha' man, there — Lanshing!"

"I'm looking," said Hoover, striving for dignified utterance. "Shall I soak him one, pal?"

"Look at him again!" said Martyn. "Hoover, ol' frien', he'sh been father, mother, sishters, aunths, whole family t' me! An, thish ish how we treat him! Hoover, you pal o' mine?"

Hoover had no words to express the degree of his affection for Martyn.

"Hoover," said Martyn. "If I had million dollarsh, I'd give it all t' him. Any man'sh pal o' mine got to prove it. What would you give tha' man Lanshing?"

"Anything *at all*!" said Hoover passionately. And broke down. He was destitute — no better than a beggar, he explained. He forgot, of course, that for two years this had been literally true. There was a conspiracy against him. Someone — he couldn't remember who it was — had lately tried to rob him even of his share of "Crandall's Revenge" — the noblest child of his brain.

"Th'sh it — you give him that!" said Martyn, as one suddenly inspired. "You're no cheap shport — you're my pal! You'd never let me give him million dollarsh an' not give him anythin' at all!"

"Never!" agreed Hoover. He made a magnificent gesture, directed at Lansing, upon whom a great white light was slowly breaking. "It'sh yoursh — all yoursh!" he said.

"Got t' be in writin'!" said Martyn solemnly. "Waiter, bring me paper 'n' pen 'n' ink."

Only Sandy Brangwyn and Lansing, exchanging quick looks, saw that the paper that Hoover

signed with trembling hand was not the one that Martyn had scribbled upon, but another sheet that Martyn had taken from his pocket. Brangwyn was one witness, the manager was another. Hoover signed, and promptly went to sleep. And Martyn stood up, a little unsteady, but in remarkably good condition.

"I'm not saying I feel fresh," he said. "There were times when I couldn't spill it on the floor — especially when Hazzard was around, and early in the evening. But I guess you won't stick to your treatment this time, Bob!"

"You were planning this all the time?" said Lansing. "Why didn't you let me know?"

"No use, till I knew I had a chance to put it over," said Martyn. "And I knew old Brangwyn, here, would tip you off." He looked at Hoover. "Seems pretty low down," he said regretfully. "But it was the only chance I saw. It was just a holdup — he didn't have any more of an interest in that show than the head usher of the theater it played in."

"It might be charitable to keep him out of Hazzard's way for a while," suggested Brangwyn.

"I guess it's up to us to look out for him," said

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Lansing. "I doubt if there's any chance of straightening him out — but I'll see what one of these cures can do. We'll call it pay for his assignment of his interest in the show. By the way, is that in good legal form, Cliff?"

"If it isn't, it's up to Hazen," said Martyn dryly. "I gave him a hint of what I thought of doing. He said that, as a lawyer, he couldn't sanction any such procedure, but that if I should bring it off, I ought to use such and such a form, and then he called in a stenographer and dictated it. He said it was all purely hypothetical."

"It was," said Lansing. "But it isn't now. Well, I guess we've got them beaten now, Cliff! You finish the camera work tomorrow, don't you?"

"Today," said Martyn. "I guess you'll see some rosy streaks of dawn when we get outside. Come on, there's a hotel 'round the corner where they'll look after Hoover, if we pay in advance. I'll bunk with you."



CHAPTER XXI

LANSING'S conscience troubled him when he thought of Hoover. True enough, Hoover deserved no consideration. He had simply let himself be used by Hazzard, and he didn't even have the excuse of thinking that he had some interest in "Crandall's Revenge." But even if the end justified the means, if it was fair to use fire against fire, it went against the grain. And so, after he had seen Martyn off to the studio, he went down to the Tenderloin hotel where they had left Hoover. The hotel people were used to such guests, and they had restored him to some semblance of manhood. He was eating a breakfast skillfully devised to appeal to one in his condition when Lansing went up to his room. And he regarded Lansing with hostility and without recognition.

"Who the devil are you?" he inquired.

"My name's Lansing, and you met me last night — early this morning, maybe — while you were with Martyn."

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"Oh, Martyn — yes," said Hoover. He passed his hand before his aching eyes.

"Look here!" said Lansing. "Do you remember anything at all about the way you've been acting lately? About letting Jim Hazzard use you to keep me from producing 'Crandall's Revenge'? About swearing to some false statements —"

"Oh, you're that Lansing, are you?" said Hoover. His voice rose until, at the end, he was fairly screaming. "You can't bluff me!" he cried. "You say I lied — prove it! I'm not afraid of you. Jim Hazzard's back of me — and he's big enough to break you in little pieces —"

"Hold on!" said Lansing. "Hoover, we played a pretty low trick on you last night, Martyn and I. Do you remember signing anything?"

Hoover started. His lips parted, as if he were about to say something. But then a light of low, animal cunning shone in his eyes.

"You can't come anything like that over me," he said defiantly. "What are you trying to get at?"

"I've got at it already, Hoover," said Lansing. "You're a pretty poor sort of thing. You're

about as low as I've ever seen a man who had a decent chance get. For two years you've lived by cadging, and you haven't even tried to do anything for yourself. Now you've let Jim Hazzard turn you into a blackmailer. We couldn't hope to argue with you — so we fooled you. You signed an agreement last night giving me any pretended interest you had in 'Crandall's Revenge.' I'll give you three guesses about what Hazzard will do when he hears about it."

"It's a lie!" screamed Hoover. "And if I did, it isn't binding! I was drunk — I wasn't responsible!"

"Binding enough," said Lansing, with a shrug of his shoulders. "Your perjury made it likely you'd get an injunction — and this thing you've signed offsets that. Hold on, now — I told you it was a pretty low trick, no matter what you'd done. I don't enjoy dipping into mud just because my opponent has done it. But I had to."

Hoover wasn't much of a villain. He had the will to be a rascal, perhaps, but dissipation had sapped his whole being. A man who wants to succeed in crooked paths needs good nerves, a clear brain. Quite suddenly, and without the least

warning, Hoover broke down completely, which was the last thing Lansing expected.

"I might have known it," he wailed. "Hazzard told me it was safe. I guess it was — for him. He didn't care what happened to me."

And he went on. He confessed everything, and he threw himself on Lansing's mercy. It wasn't a pretty sight. Waves of disgust swept over Lansing, and he wanted to get away.

"Shut up!" he said finally. "Look here, I want to do something for you. You used to have some sort of ability. If you could do jobs like the dramatization of 'Crandall's Revenge,' you must have had a sort of talent. Suppose I give you a chance to straighten out? I'll pay your way through some sort of cure, and when you come out I'll see that you get work, or money — provided I'm not broke then."

Hoover only stared at him dully.

"I can't blame you for trying to hold me up," Lansing went on. "You're not responsible for that — it's up to Hazzard. And I'm figuring that if you'd made a clean-up you might have had a chance to get on your feet. So I'll give you that same chance. Will you take it?"

“ Oh, sure! ” said Hoover. “ I will — now! My head feels as if a couple of fellows were standing over me with big clubs, hammering the way they do when they’re driving piles — first one, then the other. I always want to quit the stuff in the morning, after a toot. But it’s different at night.”

Lansing knew a doctor who had handled cases like Hoover’s. He telephoned to him now, explained the circumstances, and guaranteed the expenses. And then, with a lightened conscience, he departed. He stood in the sunshine, when he got to the street, and breathed deep. There was something infinitely depressing about Hoover. He represented one of the by-products of this game that Lansing was playing. It was a game, a life, in which old standards were twisted. It was a game that rested upon the creation of illusion, and in which it was fatally easy to substitute deception for illusion. It was a game of easy victories as well as hard, fine struggles. It was a game in which the trickster, the sharper, won, or seemed to win, as often as the honest man who wanted to earn his rewards.

And — was the game worth the candle? Was

there real profit to be found in it — profit, that is, aside from the money a man might make? He thought of Hazzard, caught up in the fierce swirl, seeming, now, to prefer trickery, downright dishonesty, to the fierce, clean fighting by which he had got his start. He thought of Martyn, an artist, crushed and discouraged, swept into a backwater, until he had nearly become like the pitiful creature he had just left. And then he thought of Martyn again, responding to the call of opportunity, rallying himself, holding to the ideal he had formed. He indulged in that rarest of things, a moment of self-analysis.

And he knew, with a great rush of pride, that it was worth while. He knew that he was fighting not for money, but for success, to prove his own quality to himself. And he knew that if he won, it would be because he could supply a public need — and that he need not be ashamed. He and Martyn had met fire with fire, they had beaten tricks with tricks, but all that was beside the point. Deep down, they were playing a clean game cleanly.

Yet there were things that rankled, and most of all the memory of how Morgan had been won

over to stay and finish the picture. Was Mary Brewster simply playing with the Englishman? Had she reasoned that it was as fair for her to trick him as for him to break his contract? Or did she really intend to marry him? He swore, at the thought of that.

He knew his own feeling well enough by this time. He was angry not alone because of his natural, male resentment at owing success to a woman, but because he was in love with her. The uncertainty he felt about her; and his inability to devote the necessary time to clearing things up, maddened him.

As for her, she had been tantalizing, provoking, both to Morgan and Lansing. She had evaded Lansing's few and tentative efforts to discuss the matter. And she had absolutely refused to let Morgan claim any of the rights of an engaged man, as she had refused to announce that an engagement existed. None did, she insisted — it was a purely provisional arrangement. Morgan had raged, but he hadn't been able to do anything about it.

Lansing reached the studio in time to witness a celebration. Martyn, with a touch of sentiment,

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had reserved the final scene of the picture to be taken last, although the scenes that had led up to it had been taken in what must have seemed, to anyone except the director himself, a hopeless and inextricable confusion. At his entrance, Martyn cried out.

"We've been waiting for you!" he said. "Here we are — the last scene of the last reel! Picture!"

At the word, action began. The film began to run, with Jim Blunt, alert, steady, turning the crank, and counting mechanically. Swiftly, surely, the action proceeded. Lansing, in the background, warmed to the way these people did their work. They had authority. They made their points tellingly, without wasting a second or a foot of film. Martyn sat almost silent; only once or twice did he bark out a short sharp suggestion. And then —

"Break!" he cried.

At once the tension relaxed. Everywhere a sort of gasp went up. It was all over. The picture was finished. The part that all these people had been playing in it was accomplished, for better or for worse. Lansing, looking around, understood

what they felt, the sense of achievement that had come to them. And he understood, too, that this was not common — that something had welded all of them into an enthusiastic body such as had never before taken part in the making of a picture. They had absorbed the energy, the spirit, that he and Martyn had devoted to the enterprise. It was their enterprise as well as his.

For a moment there was silence. Then a storm of talk broke out, hysterical, high-pitched from the women; eager and excited from the men. Words emerged from the jumble. "Wonderful!" "A great picture!" "Epoch-making!" Half crying, half laughing, Mary Brewster flung herself upon Martyn and kissed him.

"Oh, I say!" complained Morgan. "That is a bit thick — what?"

So she kissed him, too. Lansing, outside of it all, somehow caught the spirit of it — the childish delight they all took in what they had done. It was naïve, it was absurd. But there was a sort of significance to it, too. These people could not do the work they did, could not create that magical atmosphere of illusion that was the secret of success, unless they were capable of just such out-

bursts of emotion, frank, naïve, unashamed. And he was fired, seeing and understanding, with a new realization of his own part, of how absolutely imperative it was that he should let nothing interfere with ultimate success. That was up to him. These people had done their share. He could not fail them.

Martyn's voice broke in on the celebration.

"General call — for Saturday morning," he said. "You've all done well — and more than well. Maybe I've been pretty rough at times. But I'm mighty well satisfied now. Work stops right now — but pay goes on until Saturday, for extras as well as principals. On Saturday, I'll make an announcement about future plans. And now — clear the studio, if you please. I've still got a little work to do."

There was a general laugh, for they knew, these professionals, how much work he really had to do. And in five minutes they were gone, scattered to the improvised dressing rooms, and only the echo of their laughter remained. Blunt was developing; Lathrop was gathering up his properties. The mechanical force was busily engaged in clearing away the set-up. Electricians were discon-

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necting the wires of the great batteries of vacuum lights and arcs.



Gathering up the properties.

"We're on the home stretch!" said Lansing. He drew a deep breath. "I've arranged with the censorship people to view the picture Tuesday morning. That gives you time enough?"

"Working nights—yes," said Martyn. "How about Adelpia? You've got to go up against the local censors there, you know."

"They never dare to touch anything the National Board passes," said Lansing. "But it's arranged, anyhow—for next Wednesday morn-

ing. The paper goes up as soon as I wire releasing it. We'll open a week from Monday night. And we're just about coming through! When I've cleaned up this week's pay roll and paid the bills I'll have about five hundred left."

"Close figuring — but we've had some unexpected expenses." Martyn grinned as he said it. "I'd like to know what Hazzard and company have spent. Say, I didn't tell you before — didn't have a chance. But when I went to Hazzard's last night, Howell came out of his room just as I went in."

"I thought they'd join forces," said Lansing. "Hazzard never lets his personal likes and dislikes interfere with business."

"Well, we've got them licked, anyhow. Get your telegram off. I've done some work on this cutting and arranging already — the first three reels are practically ready. I'll keep Blunt here tonight. If they don't fall down on us with the positives we'll be all right."

Lansing knew that he should feel elated. He and Martyn had done a thing that half the motion-picture industry had pronounced impossible.

"Crandall's Revenge" was completed. The obstacles had been swept aside. In spite of every fair and unfair attempt that had been made to spoil the picture and to prevent it from being finished, it was done. And yet Lansing, with the echo of laughter coming to him from the dressing rooms, felt oddly, unaccountably depressed.

It was the studio that did it, perhaps. For now, with the camera standing deserted, with the stage hands quickly striking the scenes and clearing away the sets, all the illusion seemed to have vanished. The mockery of solid sets that were solid only within the camera's range, the trickery and pretence that Martyn had relied upon to make up for the lack of money, all this was emphasized. The spirit was out of Lansing and out of the studio, too, it seemed.

And then he began to reflect upon his own part in all that had been done. What did that amount to, after all? When Morgan had deserted them the whole enterprise had hung in the balance. And so, too, when Martyn had been lured away. But if he, Lansing, had been the one who had turned up missing there would have been no thought of abandoning the picture. Everything would have

gone on; some one else, Brangwyn, perhaps, would have supplied the money and stepped into his shoes.

Lansing shook his head as he glanced up at the great batteries of vacuum lights, dark now and idle. And somehow he was shaken by a wave of distaste for the whole game that he had played. Once more those doubts that had assailed him after his victory over Hoover came to plague him. Was it worth while? Wasn't the whole thing cheap, shoddy, meretricious? Had there ever been a real chance to lift the movies up, to try to develop them into a legitimate art form? Perhaps he was going to make money. But money, after all, was not the test of success; certainly, at least, it was not the only test. His father had never measured success wholly by money. Lansing laughed, rather bitterly, at the thought that he had believed that he was following in his father's footsteps, was playing the part of a pioneer.

He remembered now the contemptuous allusions of people he had known in the old days, before the smash, to the movies. Indeed, he had talked in that vein himself. He had not changed his opinion of the pictures that had inspired him to say those things; he had believed only that he himself could

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have a hand in productions that would deserve a better fate. And it seemed to him now that he had failed; that "Crandall's Revenge" was no better, in essentials, than the old films he had despised.

Only a few days before he had laughed as he flung a letter from a society devoted to the uplift of the drama into his waste basket. He had been active in that society once, in its early days; he had contributed money to efforts to interest New York in the plays of Strindberg, Wedekind, and others of the great Continental playwrights. Now, it seemed, the society meant to turn its attention to the menace of the movies. He remembered one sentence in the letter.

It is the duty of all who are interested in the future development of a native American drama, which is absolutely dependent upon the fostering of a native American taste for the best in the theater, to consider seriously some means of checking the debasing and fast-spreading popularity of moving pictures; a public devoted to the trashy delights of the screen will never provide audiences for the theater of ideas.

He had laughed at that; but he didn't laugh now. It seemed to him that it struck home; that he had,

to restore his own fortunes, struck a blow at an art that had meant much to him. It seemed to him that he had deluded himself with the belief that he could prove that the development of moving pictures might be such as to develop at the same time a taste for what was sound and good in the spoken drama.

Inevitably this sort of thing led him on to the feeling that nothing but failure lay ahead of him; that the public, upon which the success of his experiment depended, would reject it. He shook his head at last, and walked slowly to the door and out into the road. And as he made his way down the hill toward the trolley his depression was obvious in his listless walk, in the sagging of his shoulders. Mary Brewster was beside him before he was conscious of her presence.

"Oh, cheer up!" she said. "It isn't as bad as you think it is. Heavens! Cliff Martyn's the only one of the lot of us who doesn't feel blue — and that's only because he's got too much to do to relax. I've had my spell, and I've got it out of my system. Do you know what I did as soon as I got to my dressing-room and locked the door?"

He turned to smile at her, without answering.

But he felt already the contagion of her invincible cheerfulness.

"I sat down and howled!" she confessed. "I hated the picture and myself and everything and everyone in the whole world. And then I began to look back — and I knew I was wrong. Oh, wait till you see that picture run off. You know it, you know it inside out, the way the rest of us do; but you'll want to get up and cheer, just the same. You'll see that we've made your dream come true."

"My dream?" he said, and she looked at him in quick concern. For a moment there was a message in her eyes that the stupidest man might have read. But he did not see it. "Mary, I think that's just it. You may be right, but what have I had to do with it?"

"Everything!" she said. "Just everything; that's all. I know these people, remember. I've seen them work, and I've seen the pictures they've made. And — well, this is something new for them. They had a chance, you see, and it was the chance you gave them."

"Martyn," he interrupted. "You mustn't forget that the picture is his —"

"No more than yours," she said. "He's never

made a picture like this before, has he? And it isn't only because they wouldn't let him. It's because he had to wait for you to come along and show him and the rest of us that moving pictures and real drama could go together. After this everyone will fall into line; but you're the one who showed the way."

He drew a deep breath.

"I think you mean that," he said; "but how did you know that that was just what I wanted to hear? Listen, this is what I was thinking about before you came."

And he told her of the letter he had, quoting to her, as nearly as he could, the sentence that had stayed in his memory. She laughed, almost contemptuously.

"Oh — people like that!" she said. "I know them. They shrug their shoulders at anything the public likes. And I tell you the public likes the best thing it can get, in nine cases out of ten. It makes mistakes; it likes some things that are bad, and very, very often it doesn't like things that are good. But I think if I were a writer or a painter I'd always believe that the public had some good reason for what it does. I'd look for something

good in a popular thing I didn't like. I'd be pretty certain that if I only looked deep enough I'd find something bad in what I thought was good if the public disagreed with me."

"I'd like to get you in a debate with the man who wrote that letter," he said, with a laugh. "You're awfully right. He's afraid of popular things. But some of the stuff is pretty bad. You can't defend the average movie — and the public likes it —"

"I said it liked the best thing it could get," she rejoined. "The movies haven't been an — art form, do you call it? They've filled a hole. People have liked them because they gave them something to do, and because they were exciting. But that won't last. That's what the Hazzards haven't seen. And it's what you have seen — and its what Martyn has been groping for, and a good many others, too. You have only to wait and see what the public's going to think of our picture, and of the ones that are going to follow that!"

They had stopped, half-way down the hill, to talk. And now the car, that had been clanging impatiently at them for two or three minutes, went

off. They stared down, and then they faced one another, laughing.

"That's what you get for making me talk," she said. "But — you do feel better, don't you? You're not going to sag that way again?"

"No," he told her. "I'm not. You know — I think I ought to have you around all the time to keep me up to the mark."

The color flooded her cheeks then, for a moment, and she had to bite her lips before she could smile.

For a moment, as he looked at her, Lansing was moved to go on. But then he remembered Morgan, and her promise to the actor. And his old doubt assailed him. Had she made the promise to Morgan just to hold him in line? Or had she some feeling, after all, for him?

He had tried to sound her more than once, but she had repulsed his efforts easily. Since the day when she had saved him by her intervention she had never referred to the matter; she had silenced him when he had tried to bring the subject up. And now he determined, suddenly, that he would have his say; that he would not let her put him off.

"Mary!" he said, "I can't bear to think of you and Morgan — of the promise you made him.

You're not going to let yourself be bound by that, are you? You know that no one would blame you for treating it as if you had never made it?"

"I don't see why," she said, slowly. She had changed her mind as he spoke. At first she had tried to check him; then, with a certain curious sort of resignation, she waited for him to have his say out. "I made the promise. I suppose no one can force me to keep it, unless I do that myself. And, you see, that is just what I feel that I must do."

"But it's monstrous!" he cried. "Mary! The man — why, I suppose he's all right as an actor, but in every other respect —"

"I think you're a little unfair," she said, and her eyes warned him that in another moment she might lose her temper. "And — I don't want to borrow a speech from a society drama — but just what right have you to order my life?"

"You did it for me — for the sake of the picture!" he said. "You can't deny that —"

"Say that I won't!" she flashed. "I'll deny nothing, because I need not."

"I hated to have you do it," he went on, as if she had not spoken. "I'd rather have had him go. But he was trying to play a trick — and a particu-

larly mean and contemptible one. Any means could be fairly used to beat him."

"I don't want to quarrel," she said. Her eyes were very bright; the color was flaming in her cheeks. "But if you say another word —"

He looked at her in amazement, and suddenly he stiffened.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I shouldn't have spoken of it. I see that now. I won't annoy you again."

It was what she should have wanted him to say. And yet, she was not satisfied. She hesitated for a moment, tapping her foot.

"I don't understand you," she said. "Why should you care? What right have you to tell me what I am to do? No one has tried to exercise such a right — no one has ever interfered with me since I grew up; but you —"

"I'm sorry," he said, again. "You're perfectly right, of course. I had no right to speak as I did — none whatever. Will you try to forget it and to forgive me? And will you believe that I am grateful? Not only for the way you have worked, but for the things you have just been saying?"

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"Oh, I haven't done anything for you," she said, impatiently. "It's very much the other way. But I wish — I do wish I knew why you thought you could speak to me as you did. It was not like you —"

"Oh, yes it was," he said. "You see, I've been catching Martyn's trick with you and the rest of the company, I think. I haven't his paternal manner, but it seems that I couldn't resist the impulse to speak out when I thought you were going to make a mistake. But I shan't offend again."

"Here comes your car," she said, abruptly. "Don't miss it; you have a lot to do, I know. And I've just remembered that I forgot some things I want to take home with me — they're in my dressing-room. I'm afraid I won't have time to get back and catch this car."

"I'm sorry," he said. "But I think I will go on."

It was a very stiff and formidable back that she saw as he went toward the car.



CHAPTER XXII

LANSING cursed himself after he had left Mary Brewster, for his clumsiness. He had angered her, but he was angry, too, and with her, as well as with himself. She eluded him. He did not believe that she could care for Morgan, and yet was not sure. Never once, since he had known her, had she let down the ultimate bars of her reserve. He had glimpses into her mind from time to time, and yet they never satisfied him. But of his own feelings there was no longer any doubt; nor of the necessity of concealing them from her.

Had there been less for him to do he might have brooded about his relations with her; might have done some foolish, reckless thing. But there was work in abundance ready to his hand. The real burden might be on Martyn's shoulders, but Lansing found that his own share would make anything that had gone before look like play.

Some time before he had engaged a press agent. He had passed over a number of men whose reputations were already secure. And this he had done

for several reasons. He wanted a man who was not bound by traditions. Some knowledge of moving pictures, it was true, was essential, but what was even more important was readiness to blaze a new trail. And he had found his man in a young westerner, Clinton Baker, who had been in New York about a year and had been picked up by a motion-picture trade paper after a few months of general newspaper work.

"I want you to go over to Adelphia and look mysterious," Lansing had told him. "When I wire you, cut loose. By that time you ought to be friendly with every man who can help you. Spend money in advertising. Don't ask for favors — make them come to you for news stories. Be reticent, but drop enough hints for them to know that there's something stirring on a big scale."

Baker had entered into the spirit of the game from the first. He was an enthusiast for Lansing's idea. After he had talked to Martyn, and had seen parts of the picture, he was convinced that "Crandall's Revenge" was to mark an epoch. And his work in Adelphia did far more than fulfill Lansing's hopes. Baker, a first-rate reporter, was not content with the ordinary press matter; he sup-

plied each paper with specially written stories. And Lansing gloated as he read the Adelphia sheets, and was more than ever convinced that he had been wise in deciding to avoid New York for his opening.

Meanwhile he himself had enough to keep him busy, in and around New York. There were slight delays in the printing of the positives, and Lansing had to take some routine work off Martyn's shoulders.

"I'm pretty nearly all in, Bob," Martyn confessed. "My nerves are screeching. A dozen times I've rushed out to get a drink — but I've always stopped before I got it. And once I had a glass in my hand!"

"Good enough," said Lansing. "You don't need it, Cliff — you only think you do. If I thought it would help I'd tell you to go to it — but this is just the last fight you're going to have with the Demon Rum, and you'd better beat him up good and plenty and be done with him!"

"Oh, I know," said Martyn, ruefully, "but — if you don't want to have to bail me out for murder keep me away from anyone who gets in the way in the next few days! I used to think I had a pretty

good disposition. But ask Teddy Lathrop about me since we made that last scene. Anyone but Teddy would have brained me for some of the things I've called him. I'm so sick of my own face that I hate to see a mirror."

Lansing laughed at him, which was the best thing he could have done. Also, he insisted, despite Martyn's almost tearful protests, upon taking him to the first performance of a new summer show, which, for general inanity, broke even the New York record.

"Queer," said Martyn. "I feel better than I've done in days!"

That was after the show, and Lansing laughed again.

"Bully show!" said Martyn, quite seriously. "Best thing I've seen in the way of a musical show since 'The Merry Widow.'"

"Glad you liked it," said Lansing, dryly.

That was the night before the review of the film by the National Board of Censorship. Lansing himself was nervous; in spite of the fact that the board had no actual power to bar the film, he knew how important was its approval. The National Board is a voluntary body, maintained by the film

manufacturers themselves. But its decisions are accepted by many towns and cities, and the fact that its censoring committees are not paid for the time they devote to the work plays a great part in the authority its decisions have acquired.

It seemed to Lansing that the picture was proof against any censorship. And yet, when he arrived next morning at the projection room he had hired for the test he found Martyn, utterly unnerved, raging against the committee.

"They want the gambling scene cut out!" he cried. "They'd ruin the whole picture on a technicality!"

"Steady, Cliff," said Lansing.

Patiently, carefully, he listened to the complaints of the committee. Martyn's overwrought nerves had given way at the first hint of criticism; he had antagonized the committee by his vehemence. A little tact obviated most of the difficulty with the censors; cutting and patching that could be done in a single afternoon disposed of what little remained to be done.

And in every other respect everything was moving smoothly. Baker's publicity work was beginning to show results; the trade papers had sud-

denly awakened to the importance of Lansing's experiment. What was more significant, however, was the space that was devoted to the picture in the daily press. It was this that brought Lansing the first promise of recognition. Two or three of the more important State's-rights concerns scented a coming opportunity, and began to make tentative proposals to Lansing through their executives.

"If you put this thing over in Adelphia you've got us where you want us," said one of these men. "You're offering us a big chance — and I guess I'm not too hidebound to see it! The manufacturers thought they had us on the run with their big exchange systems — but I guess this is going to make them sit up and take notice!"

This was an accolade, really. It meant success — the big success that would justify everything. For it meant distribution. Already, Lansing had begun to think of the successor of "Crandall's Revenge." It ought to be begun at once — the time to strike was while the iron was hot. His depleted capital didn't worry him. Once the success of "Crandall's Revenge" was assured he could borrow all the capital he needed, and on his own terms.

Off to Adelpia went Martyn, with Blunt and Lathrop to act as escort to him and the five precious metal containers in which the five-thousand-foot parts of "Crandall's Revenge" were packed. Lansing, planning to leave next day and reach Adelpia in time to hear the verdict of the local censorship, waited to attend to final details. And to his tiny office, late that afternoon, came Jim Hazzard, unannounced, flinging open the door, and filling the small room beyond the desk at which Lansing sat.

"Hello!" said Lansing. He was bubbling with triumph; exultation sent the blood dancing through his veins like champagne. He couldn't harbor anger. The man who has won seldom can. "Come around to make up?"

"You said it!" grunted Hazzard. "You're a two-fisted man. You've put up a fight I'd have been proud to make myself. You've come near to licking us. And because of that I won't see you go down. I'll do what I've never done before — I'll make again an offer that's been turned down once. Western Film will take over your film as it stands, pay what it cost to produce it. And you can come in with me!"

Lansing stared. Hazzard was looking straight at him. And his eyes were the calm, confident eyes of a man who has the game in his hands.

"We've got you, boy," he went on. "You've beaten us up to now — but this time we've left nothing open. We could have beaten you before if we'd known how little money you had — but none of us dreamed you had the gall to make a play like this on a shoe string! I'm not bluffing — I can tell you, within fifty dollars, what you've got left."

Lansing laughed.

"You've tried to bluff me before," he began.

"I know it," said Hazzard; "and you've called our bluff. So this time we dealt ourselves the cards. If we did it from the bottom of the pack, that won't save you! Hear me, now — and understand it's facts I'm telling you. You'll not open at the Apollo come Monday night. You'll not show your picture in Adelphia at all. And you've not the money to hang on while you find another theater — which you could not do without building it, not if you had the subtreasury to draw from!"

For a minute they stared at one another. Not

for a moment did Lansing doubt that Hazzard spoke the truth. That he could not conceive of a way in which this could be so mattered not at all. There was conviction in Hazzard's whole appearance. This time, at least, he was not bluffing.

"Come, what do you say?" said Hazzard. "We've no hard feelings. It's to protect ourselves we've fought you. You're trying to put over something that would change the whole business — and we like it as it is. It's to show we've no grudge that I make you the offer. Come — yes or no?"

"No," said Lansing very quietly, very quickly, very finally. "Oh, I believe you!" He cut off Hazzard's words with a gesture. "But I'll take my chance of losing it all. I won't sell out. You've admitted the big thing — that I'm on the right track. And I'll tell you now — even if you smash me, someone else will do what I've tried to do. So, even if you win, you lose."

Hazzard looked at him, weighed him.

"You're a fool, after all," he said. "My offer's withdrawn. But remember it was made!"

He went out. Lansing sat for a long time, thinking. And, curiously, he slept as well that

night as he had ever slept in his life. This surprised him when he woke up in the morning. A few hours later, he was in Adelpia. And there any lingering hope that Hazzard might, after all, have been making one last, gigantic bluff, was dispelled.

"They've refused to pass the film," Martyn told him, "and they've served notice on Roth that if it's shown he'll lose his license."



CHAPTER XXIII

BAKER, almost sobbing with rage, had the explanation ready.

"This town's boss ridden," he said. "Talk about Tammany! Why, Tammany never even dreamed of trying the things they pull off here without batting an eye. The gang here has absolute power, because it runs the State as well as the city. And this moving-picture censorship was created just because of the chance of graft.

"Hazzard saw it — saw it before anyone. While the other manufacturers fought the bill, he backed it. And it's been in his pocket from the start. Don't ask me what it costs him; but I guess he gets his money's worth. That's the only virtue these crooks down here have. They stay bought. When they've once taken your money, you own them."

"There's no way of beating it?"

"I hired a lawyer, and he's trying to get an injunction," said Martyn. "But he doesn't give us any hope. He says the higher courts would

probably give us a square deal, but that means from six months to a year. And there's no way of getting into the United States courts — which aren't for sale."

"Then we'll pass up Adelpia," said Lansing crisply. "One thing I won't do — bang my head against a stone wall. Martyn, you and Baker stay here till you hear from me. Keep your lawyer busy. File notices of appeal. Baker, start a campaign in the reform papers, if you can — try to kick up a scandal. Make it seem that we're going to fight it out to a finish here. But — don't spend any real money."

"What are you going to do?" asked Martyn.

"I don't know yet. But I'm going down with every gun that's above water firing! I'm going back to New York. We're blocked here — that's sure. So the only thing to do is to try to win somewhere else. That's why I want you two to stay here and make a bluff. If Hazzard thinks we're still hoping to come through here, he won't be so watchful in other places — New York, for instance."

Hazzard had made good his threat. Certainly his hand had been dealt from the bottom of the

pack — but certainly, too, it was the high hand. Lansing, settled in his train, was in a cold rage.

Trick for trick — chicane for chicane. Anything was fair now, he knew — any weapon might be used that should come to his hand. But none came. Looking out of the car window, he saw the smoke of New York rising, the great sky line piercing the clouds, before even the germ of an idea came to him.

He knew precisely what forces were aligned against him now. Cramer and Howell stood with Hazzard. They would contribute to the unholy alliance the great theatrical syndicate with which they were connected. That closed more than half the theaters in New York to him at once, and, through its truce with the sometime independent group, the syndicate could now bar him from the rest. There were independent theater owners in New York, of course. But they were helpless. They would not dare to come to his aid, for the plays they produced, to be profitable, must have long road tours — and the road was closed to those who offended the syndicate or the group with which it was temporarily allied.

If he had money, he could wait, bide his time,

seize the chance that would surely come later. But — he had no money, and the enemy knew it. He had staked all on a moment — and the moment was passing. He did think of Sandy Brangwyn, but only to cast the thought out. That refuge he would not seek.

When he reached New York he hailed a taxicab and made for a theater in the heart of the upper Broadway region. In the old days, he had amused himself, more than once, by taking an interest in certain plays, productions made by the man he was now on his way to see, who was the head of those opposition managers now bound to the syndicate by a temporary and, Lansing hoped, an insecure truce. He depended upon his old connection with Frobert for an interview, and not in vain. But Frobert shook his head playfully, even while he greeted him.

“I can guess what you want, Mr. Lansing,” he said. “I’d like to give you a theater — but it would mean a fight with the syndicate, and we are not ready to start that again yet.”

The frank cynicism of this didn’t surprise Lansing, nor did it disgust him. He knew his Broadway too well.

"I'm outside of this, you understand," Frobert went on. "But I've had my orders — you're not to get a theater. Anything else I can do —"

"Look here, Frobert," said Lansing. "I'm not fool enough to appeal to you on sentimental grounds. You're a business man, and I'm here with a business proposition."

"Then I should turn you down, in any case," said Frobert, evenly. "In this business it is by being unbusinesslike that one makes money, Mr. Lansing."

"Forget it!" snapped Lansing. "Frobert — I used to think sometimes that you could look into the future. Have you seen anything in the movies except a new rival that's emptied your cheap seats? And, even if you haven't, haven't you ever thought of doing with this rival what you've always done with every other — combining?"

Frobert shook his head.

"I never think," he said. "I'm a theatrical manager. Don't you read the editorials in the papers?"

"I'm offering you the biggest chance you've ever had," said Lansing. "Listen to me: the movies are here to stay, and so is the big-feature film—the

film like mine. They may beat me. If you don't help me, they probably will. But someone else will come along whom they can't beat. And films like that aren't going to be shown in ten-cent theaters. They're going to help to fill up all the houses you and Klanger have built against one another. They're going to keep your theaters open in the summer. And you're turning down a chance to be the first to get the profit in this, Frobert! "

"I believe you," said Frobert, suavely. "But why should we waste our time, Mr. Lansing? I have an agreement. I shall stick to it. If you had come to me when I was fighting Klanger, six months ago, or if you had waited a year, when I shall be fighting him again — well, I should have had a different answer for you. But now — no."

There was finality in Frobert's voice; finality, too, in the way in which he rose and moved toward the door.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Lansing," he said. "Believe me, I am really sorry. I like to fight fair. And I think these people are wrong. I think they will be hurting themselves as well as you. But — "

He ended with a characteristic gesture, his hands spread out before him.

"Take my advice," he said. "Go to Hazard."

"No!" said Lansing, "I'll be damned if I do. I'll go down first!"

And an hour later he was prepared to admit that down he would go. For not a theater in all the town was open to him and his film. Hazzard and his allies had overlooked nothing this time. Once Lansing thought he had found a way out. He had gone to the owner of a small theater, a man who had had trouble with Klanger months before, and had been on the black list ever since. His theater was not desirable; it was badly located, and it was so small that even if it were filled to capacity, at the prices Lansing could charge, the profit would be reduced to an insignificant figure. But if the film could open there, the fight for a better theater could go on.

But, after Lansing had made his offer, and when his man seemed to be on the verge of accepting it, the telephone rang out. Lansing had a premonition of what was coming. He saw the surprised delight in the eyes of Hayman, the owner of the house he hoped to get. And after the receiver was replaced Hayman turned to Lansing.

"That was Klanger," he said, simply. "He's taken me back. It's all off, Mr. Lansing. I can't do business with you."

Lansing did not waste his strength in getting angry. Hayman and Frobert were of the same type; they made no pretences. Idealism played no part in business, as they saw it; it was every man for himself. And, indeed, both had had occasion to discover the value of that motto in the past, and their lessons had been costly.

It was late in the afternoon when Lansing finally gave up an effort that he had known for hours was vain. He had gone through the whole list of theater owners, for he was determined to make it impossible for him to reproach himself later with the thought that he had not done everything that could be done. He came out wearily into Broadway from the last office building he had visited, and in the dusk he caromed into Brangwyn.

"Hello!" said Sandy. "Where have you been?" He took a closer look, and then gripped Lansing's arm. "You need a drink," he said, firmly. "There's a place just over here where they keep the very thing."

"Not tonight, Sandy," said Lansing. "I'm afraid I couldn't stand it."

"Been going about without eating?" said Sandy. "Missed your lunch? Thought so. How's your bally movie?"

"Busted!" said Lansing. "Busted higher than a kite, Sandy. They got me!"

"I don't believe it," said Brangwyn. "What's the matter? Money?"

"Oh, that's only part of it," said Lansing. "If I'd had more than a shoestring for capital I suppose I might hang on and beat them yet; but I might not."

"Worth trying, isn't it?" asked Brangwyn. "Look here, Bob, you're a hell of a friend! Where do I come in? Haven't I got the right to lend you money if I like? I won't stand for it! You'd lend it to me like a shot if I needed it, wouldn't you?"

"No," said Lansing, "because you wouldn't take it. It's no use, Sandy. You're all right. But I won't drag you into this game. It's too much of a gamble."

"Well — isn't there anything you'll let me do?" asked Brangwyn, mournfully. "Good

Lord — I've just made a pot of money — and you won't let me help. Can't I buy an interest? "

"No — let's forget it, Sandy," said Lansing. And then, to change the subject rather than because he was interested: "You say you've been making money? I suppose you do that every day, but I didn't know you ever knew about it until they brought you an income tax return to sign."

"This is different," said Brangwyn, with a chuckle. "I swung a deal all by myself. Funniest thing I ever saw."

"Why? "

"Wait till I tell you. Jove — that's why I'm around here — wouldn't have run into you except for the deal. You know that bit of land I own up the street here — built up with a lot of old stores? "

Lansing nodded, indifferently.

"Well, I was having lunch at the shack, as it happened, and a blighter rang me up and said he wanted to come to see me on business — wanted to buy some land. I told him to go to the devil — and to Harkness, my agent. But he wouldn't. Kept on ringing, over and over again — said his name was Klanger, and this thing had to be done

direct. So I let him come, finally, to get rid of him."

"Abe Klanger?" said Lansing, chuckling in his turn. "You'd have saved time if you'd given in at once, Sandy!"

"I know it — now," said Brangwyn, ruefully. "Bob, he's terrible! He had a taxicab, and he made me come on over here with him. He wanted an option on this property here. And he made me so sore, finally, that I made him pay five thousand more than Harkness was holding it for!"

"Then it was worth ten thousand more," said Lansing. "But why did he have to deal with you?"

"I don't know — just wanted to be mysterious, I think. He said he didn't want the transfer recorded right away, or something, and he knew he was safe in dealing with a gentleman. He gave me his check for five thousand for the option."

And suddenly Lansing jumped. Little thrills chased up and down his spine. For he saw, in that moment, the significance of Brangwyn's story.

"Sandy!" he cried. "Did he make you promise to keep this deal a secret?"

"Not a bit of it," said Brangwyn. "He was

too foxy for that. Oh, I saw through him, all right. He thought if he told me not to talk, I'd go and blab it right away, but that if he didn't I might think it wasn't worth while. He wouldn't trust me."

"Oh, Sandy!" said Lansing, "you've done more for me than all the money you wanted to lend me would have done — if I can tell one man this story."

"Why not?" asked Brangwyn. "Go to it! I'd like to see you shove a spoke in that blighter's wheel."

"I'll tear the whole wheel off, Sandy! Do you know that Klanger's the man who stands in my way? And, by Jove, you've delivered him into my hands! I've got him on toast! Sandy — go and have a drink for me; I'm going to be busy."

And he left the astonished Brangwyn gaping on the sidewalk while he dashed for the nearest taxicab. In ten minutes he was in Frobert's office again; the news that Frobert had gone for the day did not for a moment lower his spirits. He even kept his temper when he understood that Frobert's office force was purposely assuming ignorance as to his movements and guessed that

Frobert had anticipated another plea and determined to avoid hearing it.

"Look here," he said. "I'm going to look around town for Mr. Frobert. But when he turns up you tell him I've got some news for him that he ought to hear — and that he ought to hear in a hurry. Tell him the whole situation has changed since I saw him this afternoon."

But if Frobert got his message he did not take it seriously; it was not until nearly midnight that Lansing, aided and abetted by friends who formed a cordon around the theater, succeeded in nailing his man.

"Well — you see me," said Frobert, resignedly. "Come back to my office."

Lansing followed him into the deserted office, and Frobert switched on the light.

"You're going to change your decision, Frobert," said Lansing. "You're afraid of Klanger —"

"I'm not afraid of Klanger or anyone else," said Frobert. "But —"

"Hold on!" said Lansing. "You and I know one another of old, Frobert. You're just waiting for a good chance to jump at Klanger's throat —"

Klanger and his whole syndicate, aren't you? You're waiting till the time is ripe?"

Frobert shrugged his shoulders in an expressive, oriental gesture.

"It may be," he said. "We have had differences before. I suppose we may have them again."

"But right now you're observing a truce. You're playing fair with one another. Neither side is expanding?"

"That is so."

"Then how do you account for the fact that Klanger holds an option on the Brangwyn property three blocks from here — the only available theater site on Broadway that's coming into the market in the next fifteen years?"

Frobert jumped up as if Lansing had shot him. His face went dead white, and his small, beady eyes were glittering.

"Is that true?" he cried. "If —"

"I've got it from Mr. Brangwyn himself," snapped Lansing. "I suppose you know that he and I are old friends. If Klanger had had sense enough to ask Brangwyn to keep it quiet, I couldn't tell you. But he was so damned careful that he

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wouldn't even trust Brangwyn and was foxy enough not to ask him to keep it quiet."

Frobert, small, dapper, raged up and down the office. He held a fountain pen in his hand, and suddenly he crushed it, so that the ink spurted and covered his whole hand.

"And I thought Klanger would play fair!" he said at last. "Mr. Lansing — you may have saved me from a very bad beating. You shall have your pick of any empty theaters I control! As to terms — we shall not quarrel. You have done me a favor, and my worst enemies have never said I was not grateful. Yes, you shall have the Thespis — it's the best. Telephone now to Adelphia and have copies of all your paper sent over — my own people will get it out. By tomorrow we will have the town covered. You shall open Monday, as you planned — but here, instead of in Adelphia."



CHAPTER XXIV

THERE was work for all of them who were behind "Crandall's Revenge" in the last days before its production. Baker proved himself a jewel among press agents. Skillfully he allowed just enough of the truth to leak out. People, reading of the sudden fierce renewal of the Klanger-Frobert feud, knew that it was connected in some way with "Crandall's Revenge."

And then came Monday night. Over the theater glittered the new sign, its electric lights blazing out. Photographs, hastily designed "paper," advertised the film. Lansing, accustomed as he was to first nights, felt strange and nervous, for so much was absent. There had been practically no advance sale; many free tickets had been distributed, of course, but Frobert had counseled moderation in that respect. The dramatic critics, in the main, stayed away; they felt, perhaps, that it was beneath their dignity to notice a moving-picture production. But all the papers were represented; the fact that the picture was advertised as a legitimate production would have assured that.

Martyn, as limp as a rag, white, and shaking with nervousness, was waiting in the dark and empty house long before the lights went up. Lansing himself was there early; he and Martyn standing about, trying to find topics of conversation that had nothing to do with the film, and getting back to it, as if drawn by a magnet, in spite of every effort. One by one other members of the cast came in. And Morgan, it seemed, was as nervous as any of them.

"Rum go, this, what?" he suggested. "My word — haven't had the shakes so since the first time I ever went on in the 'alls. I say — what do the blighters do? Applaud, and all that sort of thing?"

"Sometimes," said Martyn, sepulchrally.

"Oh, then, that's all right — what?" said Morgan. "I wondered how we'd know whether they liked it."

Martyn and Lansing roared; the artless conceit of the Englishman removed some of the strain.

Mary Brewster came in smiling, calmly confident. She had only scorn for the nervousness of Martyn and Lansing.

"Of course it's going over!" she said. "There

isn't a chance for a failure! I don't want anyone to sit near me — I want to be able to cry, all by myself, when it looks as if Crandall was going to lose! ”

People came in slowly, but the theater, even so, was filling up more rapidly than is usual on a first night. The quality of the audience was strange; very few of those who came were in evening dress. It was interested; it was plain, by the novelty of the idea, but there was a sprinkling, too, of real movie fans. And it was snatches of conversation that he overheard among some of these that first brightened Martyn.

“ They're the ones we want to get,” he told Lansing. “ Even if we are going to a lot of new people, we've got to have the old-timers to give us our start and get the picture talked about! ”

“ Let's have a look in the lobby,” said Lansing. “ The house isn't half full yet.”

But the lobby was jammed; a line stretched out into the street from the box-office window.

“ Second balcony's full,” whispered Frobert. “ Place will soon be packed. First time in two years, too! Mr. Lansing — I think you told me the truth this afternoon! ”

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And then, a few minutes later, the lights all over the house went out, and a beam of light shot down and played upon the great white screen. Five minutes later a ripple of applause ran through the house at the first entrance of Morgan, as Crandall; at the end of the first reel there was a real demonstration, swiftly checked as the next began. And before the end there was no longer any doubt as to the success of the picture. Spontaneous ripples of applause ran over the house, and there was an even surer token of success in the enthusiasm of the crowd as it filed out.

"It'll run all summer!" said Frobert, solemnly. "I owe you something, Mr. Lansing! You have not only put me in the way of making money, but you have also given me a good chance to get at Klanger."

"It's all right," said Martyn, coming up to them. "But there are one or two things we've got to do, Bob. We'll have to fill up the evening somehow—it's too short as it is. But we can get a short feature somewhere tomorrow, that will fill the gap until we've had time to make a two-reeler ourselves. And later we can arrange for some topical news service, maybe. There's one thing

sure — we can have anything we want, from anyone, after tonight! Have you seen any of the State's-rights men?"

"Not yet," said Lansing. "I'm not ready for them yet. We've got to get a new deal from them, Cliff. I think — I'm not sure about him — but I think I can make Shelley see the real possibilities in this thing. What we want is a new exchange system. We've got to expand our idea, and do it quickly. I don't mind borrowing money now — and my idea is to start two more big features at once. You can put two men to work on the making of the pictures, and keep an eye on both?"

"I can try," said Martyn.

"I want you as a sort of general director — but I don't believe you'll have time to make many more individual pictures."

"Hold on!" said Martyn, laughing, "you're going too fast for me. I need a little time to get used to the idea that we've actually put this one over."

"Oh!" Lansing brushed their whole achievement aside with the exclamation, "what's done doesn't count, Cliff; it's what we'll do next we've got to think about."

"Go on over to the hotel," said Martyn. "I've got one or two people to see. If we're really going to start up again at once I might as well nail some people that are around."

"All right — you've got a free hand, Cliff."

He made his way through eager State's-rights men, every one of them anxious to talk business, and outside he met Hazzard. Hazzard's eyes were twinkling; his huge frame shook with mirth.

"I'll forgive you for beating me, for the crimp you put in Howell and Cramer and that swine Klanger!" he roared. "And — you can show your film in Adelphia whenever you get ready. I've sent word."

"Haven't you got any shame?" asked Lansing curiously. But then he laughed. After all, this was Hazzard — an integral part of the man he had admired in the beginning, whose personality it was that had led him into this adventure that had given him back his self-respect.

They shook hands as if nothing had ever come between them. And Lansing passed on wearily, but drawing in satisfaction with every breath of the cool night air. People were looking up, as he passed them, at the great electric sign that pro-

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claimed the new film. His own name was linked with that of the film, and he thought of the day when he had seen people looking curiously at the great bulk of Lansing's store, emblem of his failure, his worthlessness, as they looked now at something that symbolized his proving of his right to the name he bore.

So he came to the restaurant where they were to celebrate — the little group who had helped him to make this success. That had been Brangwyn's idea. Martyn would be there, and Baker, Mary Brewster, Morgan, Teddy Lathrop, Jim Blunt, one or two of the principals. At the thought of Mary Brewster he flushed. And, curiously, she was the only one who was in the private room Sandy had engaged.

He saw that she looked tired; as tired as he himself felt. But she brightened a little when she saw him, and came toward him to greet him, with both hands outstretched.

"Oh, I'm glad!" she said. "You did win; I knew you would. And you'll be rich, and I'll be famous —" She made no effort to free her hands from the firm grasp in which he held them.

"You —" he began. "I don't believe I need

to tell you that I know the part that you and the others took — you more than any of them. You're artist enough to have weighed all that, and not to be falsely modest. And — except for you we'd never even have finished the picture! "

"Don't!" she said, sharply. "Don't let's talk of that —"

"We've got to," he said grimly. "I — I wish you had let it all go to smash, or that I'd been man enough to stop you. Look here, you're not going through with it? You're not going to marry Morgan? You promised just to keep him in line?"

And then she did take her hands from him. She moved away from him slowly, and he saw the wave of color that swept up, staining her neck and her cheeks.

"You've no right to say that," she said. It seemed to be hard for her to speak. "You've no right to think that, even to help you, I'd have —"

She stopped, and he said nothing. And in a moment she tried again.

"That I'd marry him —" she began.

"You haven't!" cried Lansing. "You haven't married him! Why, I —"

Confession, avowal, pleading, were plain, not

in his words, but in his eyes. He saw the look of understanding that came over her, and checked his swift step toward her, to stand, silenced by the look in her eyes, abashed.

“You!” she said, slowly. “Do you — care like that? I thought — and then I didn’t dare to think so! Oh —”

The color receded slowly from her cheeks, and the depths of her gray eyes grew somber, and lines of despair seemed to settle about them, and in the corners of her mouth.

“Oh!” she cried. “Oh — my dear! I’d stopped hoping that you’d ever care! You didn’t then — oh, you didn’t! If you had — I suppose I couldn’t have done it! But I couldn’t bear to see everything go — to know that you’d lost when I could have saved it all for you. And now? I must go through with it. You know that. He kept his word — I can’t break mine.”

It was the utter frankness of her revelation that tortured Lansing most. He wanted to take her in his arms, and hold her so, defying her conscience, Morgan, everything that stood between them. But he knew that she would be too strong for him. He knew that she meant to pay, to keep her prom-

ise. And then, while they still stood staring at one another, and just as the strain was growing intolerable, Brangwyn came in, chuckling delightedly.

"Hello, you two!" he said. "I say — this is some night. You ought to hear the way they're talking about you, Miss Brewster. Ears burning? Shouldn't wonder! But poor old Morgan — your little English friend is up against it for fair."

"What's the matter with him?" asked Lansing. He was surprised at the indifferent sound of his own voice.

"Oh, nothing much," said Sandy; "friend wife hears he's making a pot of money and turns up to get her share — that's all."

"Morgan's *wife*?" cried Lansing. Exultation shook his voice now. He looked at Mary Brewster, and saw that the color had flooded her cheeks again.

"Wife!" insisted Sandy. "Bad thing for a *matinée* idol, a wife is. So he left her behind him in dear old Lunnion, don't you know. She didn't mind that so much. But it seems he wrote her a while ago that it was all off — that he was going to get a divorce over here and pass her up. So she came over to spank him and show him just

where he got off. She landed today, chased him all over the shop, and finally heard about this party. Heard I was giving it and pretty nearly pulled *my* hair out. Then he came along, and Martyn's with them now, trying to get them calmed down. But I guess we'll have to celebrate without him."

"Is this straight, Sandy?" asked Lansing. "It isn't your idea of a joke?"

"You go and ask Morgan if it's a joke," said Sandy, indignantly. "She scared the truth out of him. He wanted to get hitched up with some chicken he met here. Explained that he'd heard you could stop off at Reno and get a divorce between trains. He's a great actor, maybe — but that lets him out."

And then Mary Brewster laughed, and Sandy looked at her gratefully, because it had seemed to him that an unusually good joke was falling very flat, and that this was a reflection on his manner of telling it. But Lansing caught the hysterical note in her laughter, and he took Sandy, gently, but very firmly, by the shoulders, and pushed him through the door.

"Sandy — go away from here!" he said.

“Get the others — but don’t come in or let anyone else come in, for ten minutes.”

He shut the door on Sandy’s protest. And then he turned toward Mary. She had dropped into a chair, and he couldn’t see her face, because it was buried in her hands. He reached her in two strides and caught her up in his arms. She was crying, as he had been afraid she was, but she was laughing, too. And she clung to him so that for a moment her face was still hidden. And then, when he had forced her back, so that he could see her eyes, he was awed by the look that was in them.

“Oh!” she said. “Oh, my dear — I can have you, after all!”

There was so little time — and they had so much to tell one another; but they could laugh at that. And when Sandy came back, and Martyn, and all the rest, except Morgan, trooped in with him, Lansing and Mary were standing, most decorously apart, the width of the room between them. Mary’s cheeks were flushed, and Lansing was biting his lips, but no one thought that strange. And later, after Sandy had, ponderously, and with a quite extraordinary gathering of all

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the stock phrases of the last five years, proposed a toast to the great film and the many that were to follow it, Lansing rose to answer. And he proposed the health of those who had done the work, as he put it.

"I hope you'll all be in films that will put this one to the blush," he said; "but I'm afraid Cliff Martyn won't forgive me very easily, because I'm going to rob him of his biggest asset!" He raised his glass to Mary, and she blushed again, so that there was no need at all for Lansing to tell them his great news!





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